

Authority for Edification—Not Destruction

Luke 4:31-37; 2 Corinthians 13:8

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One of the most conspicuous marks that characterized the ministry of Jesus Christ was that of AUTHORITY. **Authority refers to the lawful right to exercise power.** Jesus possessed a unique right to exercise power in His teaching, in His healing, and in His miracles. Jesus especially demonstrated His authority in His death and resurrection. For no one took His life from Him, but rather He laid it down willingly for His people, and with absolute authority He took back His life when He rose again from the dead on the third day. Jesus Christ came in the authority of His Father, and because He humbled Himself to fulfill the will of His Father in all things (even to the point of suffering the wrath of God on the cross) God highly exalted Him and has given Him a name that is above every name.

Dear ones, AUTHORITY should not be a dirty word to the Christian. However, by its abuse, it becomes just another word for lording it over others to please oneself or get one's own way. But lawful authority under God should always demonstrate these three biblical ideas. (1) **Humility**—Authority recognizes that you rule on behalf of God and serve Him first and foremost rather than yourself; and that you must give an account on the Day of Judgment as to how you have exercised His authority. (2) **Truth**—Authority can only be exercised for the truth and not against the truth. Lawful authority does not uphold lies and errors, but that which is faithful and true. And (3) **Love**—Authority is to be used only for the profit and benefit of others, and not to please oneself. Authority is for the edification of others—not for their destruction.

Those who know best how to submit themselves to lawful authority will best be gifted in exercising lawful authority. May God help us to refrain from giving His authority a bad name by the way we misuse and abuse it; for to abuse God's authority is to abuse His name.

Let us consider the amazing authority of the Lord Jesus from our text this Lord's Day: (1) The Authority of Christ's Doctrine; (2) The Authority of Christ's Miracles; and (3) The Amazing Authority of Christ.

I. The Authority of Christ's Doctrine (Luke 4:31-32)

A. As our text begins, Christ enters the town of Capernaum on the Sabbath, going into the synagogue where He begins teaching the people. The tense of the verbal phrase and the use of the plural ("sabbaths") would indicate that this was the usual practice of the Lord (he was continually teaching in the synagogues of the Jews on the Sabbath days). This is yet the calling of every minister of Jesus Christ. The repeated practice of preaching each Lord's Day should not make preaching common, but rather increase your hungering and thirsting for it.

B. Luke 4:32 says, "And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power" (i.e. authority). The parallel passage in Matthew 7:29 states: "For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." What seemed particularly to impress the people was the authority with which Christ taught. His doctrine (or teaching) was preached with an authority lacking in that of the Jewish teachers of the law. How was it different? I submit that it was different both as to the content of His doctrine and as to the manner in which His doctrine was preached.

1. Let us consider first the **AUTHORITATIVE CONTENT of Christ's doctrine** vs. that of the scribes (teachers of the law). There was a fundamental difference between Christ and the scribes as it relates to the authority of Scripture vs. the authority of the oral tradition of the elders.

a. Much of the Judaism practiced at the time of Christ believed that Moses had received by revelation from God, in addition to the first five books of the Bible, an unwritten oral law, which Moses allegedly delivered to Joshua, who delivered it to the elders of Israel, who delivered it to the prophets, who delivered it to the men of the Great Synagogue, a college of learned men in 325 B.C. These unwritten oral laws or traditions (such as washing ceremonially before eating, Mark 7:1-9) then became the possession of the various schools of the scribes and elders at the time of Christ. This unwritten oral tradition was condemned by the Lord Jesus (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, Milton Terry, p. 615).

b. It was common for the teachers of the law to place the burden of this oral tradition upon the backs of the people by the mere authority of man and without any lawful authority from God in Scripture. It is this unwritten oral tradition and not the biblical commandments of God's Law that Jesus condemned in Matthew 23:4.

c. Such traditions abounded in the Jewish religion of Christ's time, and the Lord directly attacked the alleged authority of these traditions by calling them the mere "commandments of men" or the "traditions of men" (Mark 7:7-8). The Lord was challenging the scribes and the Pharisees to prove from Scripture that the tradition of the elders was given by the authority of God. In so doing the Lord was saying that the Scriptures are a sufficient and complete rule for faith and practice (and that all matters of faith and practice must be agreeable to the Scriptures). If what is, therefore, required by a minister, a pope, a priest, a church, a father, a husband, a president, or a congress is not agreeable to Scripture, it speaks not with the authority of God, but with the mere authority of man (2 Corinthians 13:8). Jesus taught that the authority of Scripture is supreme (Mark 7:8-9,13). This was the authority which Christ came preaching, and the people were amazed, as if He were preaching some new doctrine, when in fact, it was not new at all, but was rather simply recovering the old and original doctrine of the Divine and supreme authority of Scripture that was taught in the Old Testament.

d. The Papal Antichrist usurps the authority of Christ in sitting as infallible head of the Visible Church and in requiring the absolute obedience of his worshippers. He changes the law of God and introduces into worship that which God never appointed in His Scriptures. He proclaims that Mary was conceived without sin, lived a sinless life, and was bodily assumed into heaven after her death so that she had a bodily resurrection like that of her Son (contrary to 1 Corinthians 15:23). The Papal Antichrist claims to have the authority to impose such heresy upon people from unwritten oral tradition allegedly received from Christ and the apostles. Just as Christ condemned the oral tradition of the elders in Mark 7:1-9, so Christ condemns the oral tradition of the Harlot Church of Rome for the same reason—oral tradition subverts the commandment and authority of God in Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

e. This usurping of God's authority is done not only by the Papal Antichrist, but by ministers and elders in Protestant and Reformed Churches who add (apart from the authority of God) uninspired hymns to God's worship, or add the celebration of holy days not instituted by Christ, or add skits, music teams, and dancing (none of which have God's appointed authority from Scripture). There is also an antichrist spirit that pervades in magistrates who supplant the law of God by their own authority (desecrating the Divine institution of marriage) or in husbands and fathers who use their authority not for the edification and good of their wives and children, but simply to let them know who is boss. **Our historical testimony is not the same as oral tradition.**

2. But there was a second way in which Christ manifested His authority and that was in **THE MANNER in which He taught**. Jesus did not come preaching with any doubt or uncertainty. He came preaching with absolute confidence that what He was saying was God's truth. The pulpit is not a place for timidity, but of boldness ("Thus saith the LORD").

a. In fact, we have an example of how Christ preached in the Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew 5), where Christ contrasts what the Jewish leaders taught by way of their perversion of God's Law, and what He as the Son of God taught by way of the true interpretation of God's Law ("You have heard

that it was said . . . but I say unto you”). Jesus spoke unlike any man before Him, for He alone was God in flesh.

b. Dear ones, our whole salvation rests upon the unique authority of Christ to be our teacher, our sacrifice for sin, and our king to rule over us. If He did not have the authority He claimed (but was like any other mere man), the Christian faith would fall like a row of dominoes. Never forget that your faith rests in Christ’s authority and not in the authority of any mere man. Christ’s authority is unshakeable, and is confirmed by the fact that He raised Himself from the dead on third day. All that Jesus claimed was true of Him depended upon His resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40). It all stands or fall upon His resurrection.

II. The Authority of Christ’s Miracles (Luke 4:33-35)

A. Christ’s miracles were like object lessons visibly demonstrating and authenticating His authority as our Prophet, Priest, and King. This miracle in particular demonstrates vividly the authority of Christ over all His enemies: Satan’s kingdom is cast out and must yield to the Lord Jesus Christ as King.

B. One might consider that such a spectacle would have been a hindrance to Christ’s preaching (no doubt that was the devil’s intent). But it was over-ruled by God’s wise providence to His own glory and for the benefit of His people. The same may be said about all of your trials, tribulations, temptations, afflictions, and suffering in this life. Satan intends to hinder the Kingdom of Christ, but Christ over-rules it for His glory and for your good.

C. The spirit that controlled this man was called “an unclean spirit”, for it was in nature contrary in every respect to “the Holy Spirit.” How the man came to be so controlled by this unclean spirit we are not told. Here before the eyes of all in the synagogue (and before our spiritual eyes as well) is a picture of the battle between Jesus and Satan, and the Lord Jesus publicly humiliates him.

D. The unclean spirit interrupted the Lord’s preaching with this disturbance, and yet was compelled to call Him, “the Holy One of God” (Psalm 16:10—a messianic reference to the resurrection of Christ). However, the Lord rebuked the spirit and commanded him to hold his peace and come out of him. Why did the Lord not want this unclean spirit to acknowledge Him as the Messiah? Because Christ did not want the testimony of a liar, nor did He want it to appear that He was in league with the devil (for which He was accused in Matthew 12:24). Even if the truth is communicated, we are not to communicate the truth by means not authorized by God (good ends do not justify unlawful means).

E. The Lord allowed this unclean spirit to have one more show of power with this man and then it came out with a loud voice. This was to demonstrate that the unclean spirit did not willingly come out, but was forced to submit to the authority of Christ. This poor sinner was set free by the grace of God from bondage to this unclean spirit.

1. Dear ones, we were all to some degree like that man— controlled by the devil (2 Timothy 2:25-26). We thought we were doing our will when we were simply doing Satan’s will. We were by nature the children of wrath and were in Satan’s kingdom and did his bidding. But the Lord Jesus came to us in our miserable, sinful estate, and set us free.

2. There is no besetting sin that you cannot overcome through the authority of Christ. Yes, you must avail yourself of all the means that He has authorized—namely, communing with Christ in prayer and filling your mind with His promises, hating your sin and loving Christ’s righteousness, earnestly and fervently seeking God that He would deliver you from the temptation to sin, fasting, removing yourself from the temptation as much as possible, accounting yourself dead to sin but alive to God. You are more than conquerors through Christ who loved you.

III. The Amazing Authority of Christ (Luke 4:36-37)

A. You can certainly see why both the doctrine and miracles of Christ brought such amazement to the people? But did they believe? They were amazed and astonished, but were they driven to embrace the authority they heard and saw in Christ? After Christ multiplied the fish and the bread, the people were amazed. But since their faith had not been fed, but only their stomachs, they wanted Christ to continue to wow them with another miracle and another miracle. You see, it is not just the miracle that should wow you. It is the authority of Christ and God that is heard in the doctrine and seen in the miracle that should humble you and turn you to embrace Christ Jesus alone for your salvation and help in all trials. For without the authority of Christ your faith is in vain.

B. Without the authority of Christ in Scripture our ideas about religion are no better than those of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Roman Catholic, or Mormon. Without the authority of Christ in Scripture all religions are on the same playing field, and we should in fact tolerate all doctrines and practices of worship within this church. The only right that I have to preach the gospel (or to administer the sacraments) is due to the authority of Christ in Scripture, who is the only Head of His church.

Dear ones, the Lord Jesus calls you to come to Him, who will always use His authority for your good, for He uses His authority to cast out of your life all that will destroy you. He uses His authority to prepare you for heaven. Come to Christ and submit to His authority. Don't be like the demon who submitted to Christ's authority unwillingly, unthankfully, or begrudgingly. Come to Jesus Christ as Savior and bow to Him as Lord.

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