

Understanding Authority

- INTRODUCTION → **Matt 28:17-20**, Why do we have issues with authority?
 - Questioning or defying authority is our constitutional right.
 - Question everything / anti-authority / our culture is skeptical
 - We resist the concept of authority. We don't like submission
 - Most American evangelicals do not view church as a place where you submit to the leadership for the purpose of growth and accountability, but rather church is a place to consume spiritual goods based on preference and needs
 - If you like the place and it services your needs, you come back.
 - If another place down the road offers a more pleasant experience, well...
 - Therefore, some pastors don't say anything controversial or entertain
 - Since the customer is always right, they seek to attract & retain
 - But that's not the point of church or of leadership & authority
 - The idea of spiritual authority scares us because there are plenty of people who shouldn't be followed in leadership positions - yes, in churches
 - Much harm has been done under the mantra of "Don't touch the Lord's anointed"
 - Some leaders label criticism as divisive, silencing all contrary voices, abusing true biblical authority.
 - Whereas Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Word mark a church as different from the yacht club, for example, biblical authority and submission most obviously mark a church as different from a Bible Study.
 - Ex: a family doesn't always have a new birth and doesn't always eat dinner together, but there is - by intended design - a structure of authority & accountability (from a place of love) between parents and children.
 - When this structure is absent, we have a term for it - dysfunctional
 - The local church family loves one another within a structure of authority
 - These authorities guide us and empower us
 - So what are the authorities?
 - The family has ONE head and purpose - Jesus and his glory
 - The family has TWO guiding authorities - the Word (written and incarnate) and the Spirit (Spirit of the Word/Jesus)
 - For us, there are THREE roles of participation in the family
 - Elders (under-shepherds) - rightly handle the word of God
 - Deacons (servants) - serve practically to empower the elders
 - Members (priesthood of all) - equipped to live out the Word in the church/world
- **The church has ONE head & purpose → Jesus and his glory**
 - Jesus is the head of the church → What does that mean?
 - *Colossians 1:17-18, [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the*

beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

- Jesus is the chief cornerstone → foundational block against which all is laid
 - *1 Peter 2:6–7, [6] For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a **cornerstone** chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” [7] So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the **cornerstone**,”*
- Jesus is the chief shepherd
 - *1 Peter 5:1–4. [1] So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: [2] shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; [3] not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the **chief Shepherd** appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*
- Jesus is the King of kings, the Prophet of prophets, the Shepherd of shepherds
 - Jesus has all authority on earth and in heaven and yes, that includes the church. It exists for him, through him. He is it’s head
 - We cannot make the church about anything less than Jesus. We cannot elevate anyone’s authority above Jesus’ authority.
 - No teacher, no pastor, no religious leader, no government. Jesus.
- Our purpose? Obeying Jesus, to fill the earth with the glory of God
 - *Habakkuk 2:14, For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*
 - *Matthew 28:18–20, [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 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.”*
 - *Romans 15:20, “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation”*
 - The church is not primarily a social group, a political organization, or a book club. It is a missiological battering ram, a missionary troupe, an army of ambassadors proclaiming the authority of the King
- The church is led by an authoritative King who gives authoritative commands to be obeyed. But how do we know the commands?
 - **The church’s TWO guide voices are the Word and the Spirit**
 - The Word and the Spirit
 - God has always tamed the chaos with the Word and the Spirit
 - Spoke into the darkness to create the light

- Spoke the Law into lawlessness to create ordered society
- Stepped into the Darkness as the Light, the incarnate Word
- Titus: Crete is a mess? Preach the Word.
- Timothy: Unsound doctrine? Teach the Word.
- *2 Timothy 3:14–17 [14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God [SPIRIT] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*
 - God has given us sacred writings his Word
 - They reveal salvation through faith in Jesus
 - They are divinely inspired by the Spirit of God
 - They are beneficial, profitable, helpful
 - To teach us the way
 - To point out where we are off the way
 - To show us how to get back on the way
 - To make sure we stay on the way
 - Jesus has given us his authoritative Word and we must follow it
- *2 Peter 1:3–4 [3] His divine power [SPIRIT] has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, [HOW?] through the knowledge of him [WORD] who called us to his own glory and excellence, [4] by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises [WORD], so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature [SPIRIT IN YOU], having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. [REBORN BY SPIRIT]*
 - He has given us ALL WE NEED in the Word of God and the Spirit.
- We trust his authority, submit to his authority b/c he knows what is best
- The church doesn't do what is convenient or what the culture suggests. The church obeys Jesus, revealed in his Word and his Spirit
- The church doesn't cave to culture, the church obeys the Word/Spirit
- The church doesn't fear persecution, the church obeys his authority
- The church doesn't create its own vision and mission statement - it obeys Jesus' Great Commission
- The church doesn't redefine marriage, sin, or anything else that is already clearly defined in the Word of God
- Word and Spirit → These are our guiding forces, under the authority of Jesus until his fame saturates the earth
- **For us, there are THREE ways to participate in the family**
 - This is the continued structure within the family of authority and accountability
 - Elder, Deacon, priesthood of all (not a perfect analogy, but think of it as dad, mom, every member of the family)

- Elders (under-shepherds) - rightly handle the word of God
 - *Titus 1:5–9, [5] This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—[6] if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. [7] For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, [8] but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. [9] He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. [10] For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. [11] They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. [12] One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” [13] This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, [14] not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. [15] To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. [16] They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. [1] But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.*
 - Qualifications: Character; Calling; Competency
 - Competency: Elders ought to know, feed, lead, and protect the family
 - Knowing the family means being able to identify who is in the congregation and relating to them personally.
 - Elders know who has been entrusted to them, people in their family reborn by the Word and the Spirit
 - Feeding the family means engaging in a robust proclamation and teaching ministry and empowering personal discipleship.
 - Man does not live by bread alone but by the Word
 - Elders feed the family w/ the Word by the Spirit
 - Leading the family requires keeping the church on target (#1) and exemplifying personal holiness & discipleship by example
 - A good dad says do as I say AND do. A good dad can say, “Marry a man like me” to his daughters or “Be a husband like me” to his sons.
 - Elders are called to lead by example and by inspiration as they continually point to the Word by the Spirit
 - Protecting the family means defending sound doctrine, rebuking sin, exhorting, encouraging, sacrificially dying

- This is about being deeply rooted in the Word and being led by the Spirit of Christ
- Deacons (servants) - serve practically to free the elders up to focus on what God has commanded them to do; they empower the elders to do the above
 - *Acts 6:1–4 [1] Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. [2] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. [3] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. [4] But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*
 - Same qualifications except ability to teach (may or may not be able)
 - Deacons, literally, servants provide logistical and material support so that the elders can focus on the Word of God and prayer.
 - This is a major area of confusion in America. Most of our pastors today aren't elders, they are deacons.
 - What do I mean? Most pastors today focus more on chaplaincy duties than on the Word and prayer
- Members (priesthood of all) - equipped to live out the Word in the church/world
 - *Ephesians 4:11–12, [11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...*
 - *1 Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*
 - *Matthew 28:18-20, [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 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.”*
 - Do the work of the ministry; A royal priesthood; Make disciples
 - Don't be spiritual consumers, but spiritual producers, fruit bearers
 - Don't despise authority, it is for good reason that God has given it
- Authority and accountability are good. They mature the church family to be what God desires it to be. They keep the family focused on what really matters - the glory of Christ
 - To despise biblical authority is to be like a teenager who doesn't understand why mom and dad have good, healthy rules
 - As a parent is entrusted with the welfare of their kids, authority within the church is about pursuing health and growth, not about control
 - Practically:

- Elders - never let go of the high calling that we have received and always stay rooted deeply in the Word and the Spirit. Focus on your primary tasks and do not neglect them.
 - Deacons / Those who love to serve - Do not begrudge your serving, but realize that you empower others to use their gifts as you use your own. If you are good at something, keep on doing it with joy
 - All - As a family grows up, matures, and has kids, we are all supposed to grow and participate in serving and making disciples. Church is not a place to consume spiritual goods. It is a family for participation and development.
 - Hebrews 13:17, Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls and will give an account for their work. Let them do this with joy and not with complaints, for this would be no advantage for you.
- APPLICATION: Table Talk
 - Do you get defensive when you think about church leadership exercising authority? Why or why not?
 - Pastor Bill said that church family has:
 - ONE head and purpose - Jesus and his glory;
 - TWO guiding authorities - the Word and the Spirit;
 - THREE roles of participation - elders, deacons, priesthood of all
 - How are you honoring Christ as head of the church?
 - In what ways are you contributing to the purpose of the church?
 - Do you treat the Word and the Spirit as your guiding authorities? How?
 - Where do you fit in? Are you participating in your role?
 - Are you a consumer or a producer? What's your action step?