

God's Sovereignty

By Mark Dunagan

Editor's Note: This lesson was originally presented in a Bible study on authority by Mark Dunagan of Beaverton, OR. This along with the other sixty-eight lessons that make up the study can be seen in their original context at www.beavertonchurchofchrist.net. Used with permission.

“The conclusion, when all has been heard is: fear God and keep His commands, because this applies to every person”
(Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Sovereignty

The term “sovereign” means, “above or superior to all others; chief, greatest; supreme”. God is presented in Scripture as being above everyone and everything else, as being the supreme ruler and the One who has the say in what is right and what is wrong (*Genesis 14:19 “the most high God”; Deuteronomy 10:17; 32:39; Joshua 2:11; 1 Chronicles 29:11; 2 Chron. 20:6; Nehemiah 9:6; Job 33:13; 36:23; 41:11; Psalm 24:1; Daniel 2:21; Acts 17:24-26; Romans 14:11; Ephesians 4:6; James 4:12 “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy”*).

“What Gives God The Right?”

Many issues of “authority” boil down to, “What right does God have to tell me what to do?” In response, let me offer these considerations:

God created you, as well as everyone else. In addition, you didn't receive all of your “being” from your parents, for God forms the spirit of each and every person (*Genesis 1:26; Ecclesiastes 12:7 “then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it”; Zechariah 12:1*). Each of us owes our entire existence to God, and that naturally brings with it the moral obligation to serve Him.

God is completely holy, pure and just (1 John 1:5). He has the moral and ethical right to tell us what to do, seeing that He is always right (*Romans 3:4; Psalm 119:128 “Therefore I esteem right all Thy precepts concerning everything”*).

God is completely pure and hence He has no ulterior motive (like selfishness, a big ego, or so on) for commanding us to serve Him and following His laws. All His commands, even negative commands, are in our best spiritual and eternal interest (*Deuteronomy 5:33 “that it may be well with you”; 6:24 “for our good always and for our survival”; 1 Peter 3:10-11*). Behind every command of God is eternal wisdom and tremendous love for the human race.

We have proven over and over again our inability to discover truth and guide others or ourselves by our own wisdom (*Jeremiah 10:23; Romans 3:23; Romans 1:18-32*). Mankind has morally disqualified them from calling the shots.

After all our sins and selfishness, God then sent His own Son to die for our sins. Thus, God has proven over and over again that no one loves us like He does, that no one has our best interest at heart like He does, and that serving Him is not a lost of life, but rather, gaining true life (*Matthew 16:24-25*).

Added to this, in the Book of Job, when Job begins to question God's moral government of this universe, God challenges Job to answer some questions about how this physical world works and how it was created (Job 38:1ff). The point is that since man can't even figure out how all physical processes work (simple addition and subtraction in the mind of God), then man doesn't have any right to question God's commands and moral governing of the universe. If man can't even figure out the physical realm, then certainly he doesn't have the right to challenge God's wisdom in the spiritual realm.

“Authority”

*“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”
(Matthew 28:18).*

The term “authority” means “the right and power to command, enforce laws, determine, influence, or judge”. Jesus is telling us that He has the right to tell us how to live, what to do and not to do, how to worship God, what is right and wrong, and all other issues. A proper relationship with God must start with the acceptance that God is God and am I not, and that God has the right to tell me how to live in every area of my life. This is what it means to be in subjection to God or Christ (Ephesians 5:24; 1 Samuel 3:9 “Speak, Lord, for Thy servant is listening”).

Authority and Faith: Faith is the acceptance that God has the moral right to tell us what to do, and that God always knows what He is talking about. David expressed it well, when he said, “Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar” (Romans 3:4).

'Let' implies that 'let this always be our conclusion when any difference is found between human thinking and God's view'. Let the ways of God always be seen as right and just, and let all human critics be viewed as liars. 'Paul quotes Psalm 51:4. David has just confessed the terribleness of his sin. A sin that was pleasant! Sin with a beautiful woman! His attitude was, that God would deal justly with him. Whatever decision God would make would be a righteous one. And when people examine his treatment and VIEW OF DAVID'S ACTIONS they would all see that God had indeed been equitable with David.'*

After committing adultery with a beautiful, willing woman, David ADMITS THAT GOD IS RIGHT (in the right to call such wonderful passion-from the human point of view-SIN). Have we learned this lesson?

Therefore, at the heart of Bible Authority is the trust that God has all the right answers, even when those answers are unpopular in our surrounding culture, and even when everyone seems to disagree with God.

Modern Applications: Our modern culture says homosexuality is genetic or natural, God says otherwise (Romans 1:27). Modern culture wants many reasons to divorce, God says otherwise (Matthew 19:9). Some want the days of Genesis to be millions of years in length, God says otherwise (Genesis 1:14; Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 19:4; Romans 1:20). Some religions say women should be pastors, God says otherwise (1 Timothy 3:2). Some say capital punishment is murder, God says otherwise (Romans 13:4).

Authority and Love: While some want to place love on a higher plane than obedience, Jesus linked these two qualities together (John 14:15). One writer noted, “The Bible teaches that the

only way to yield to God's love is to yield to God's authority, and that therefore the love principle never rises higher than the authority principle”**

The same truth is found in 1 John 2:3-6; 5:3; 1 Corinthians 7:19 and 1 Timothy 6:13-14. In Luke 18:18-25, we find the story of the man whom Jesus could not save. It was not because Jesus did not love him, for Mark states that He did (Mark 10:21). Nor is it because He lacked the power, for He had authority over all flesh (John 17:2). Jesus told him that there was one thing that he must do if he would be his faithful disciple. The young man rejected Jesus' expectations. Hence, to spurn Jesus' commands is to spurn His love for us. We must reject the philosophy that “love” and “thus says the Lord” are on some occasions incompatible. Paul pointed out that love “rejoices in the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:4-6); therefore, love and obedience to the will of God, are never in conflict. Or, we could say that love and obedience to the will of God, love and respect for God's authority is the same thing (Malachi 1:6-8).

When we talk about Bible Authority, remember, we are not talking about something that is cold and sterile or academic. Rather, we are talking about how true love for God is expressed and demonstrated.

* McGuiggan p. 116

** The Spiritual Sword, October 1973, p. 43.