

Authority

AUTHORITY

This is the important issue that divides people into many camps. Who or what is your authority determines the decisions you make, where you go, what you do, who you hang out with, and what your world view is. Biblically, there are two choices of authority--God or yourself. The vast majority choose self, and in doing so, knowingly or unknowingly, are in league with Satan in rebellion against God. Keep in mind that I am speaking of the one true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and not just any god invented by the mind of man. The one true God has a specific unique plan for the redemption of mankind through the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Humanists would have you believe that there are many gods and many valid religions, but the Bible presents us with one true God, and one way of salvation that God has sovereignly provided. Peter said it well in Acts 4:12, "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we may be saved". Therefore all other ways and all other gods are simply invented by men so that they can be justified in doing what they already preconceived of doing. In short, their authority is themselves.

The Gospel of Luke on Authority

In studying the Gospel of Luke, the author wrote a series of stories that reveal the God who truly has authority over all things. First of all, in Luke 4:32, we see Jesus continually teaching the Word of God wherever He went. His teaching was the TRUTH that God was revealing to a wayward world. In many other passages the Word of God as revealed by Jesus is likened to light that illuminates a dark world. In fact, Jesus refers to Himself as "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12), and in John 3:19-21, we are told that Jesus came into the world to bring "the light" into a dark world, but the world loved the darkness because the light shines on what is untrue and evil and exposes it. People want to be left alone to do their own thing. Everywhere Jesus went teaching people, they were amazed at His teaching because His message was with authority. They had many good teachers, but something was clearly different about this guy. Others quoted from scholars, rabbis, and priests; but Jesus spoke directly from God. The author of Hebrews told us in Heb 1:2-3 that this is what the New Testament is, "in these days (the church age) God has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also God made the world. And Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's nature..." Therefore, when it comes to truth, God's authority is expressed through Jesus.

The next issue of authority presents itself in Luke 4:33-36. Jesus had authority over all spiritual beings. In Luke's story, Jesus rebuked demons, and people were amazed that Jesus had "authority and power" over unclean spirits. If you are like me, you wonder about the reality of the spirit world, and may even tend to doubt all the Bible's stories about fallen angels (demons) because you have never experienced any of this. The Bible is clear that Satan exists and lives to oppose God on every front. Paul warned in Ephesians 6:12 that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." I liken this spiritual war to the "cold war" between America and Russia in the 50s and 60s. We knew there was thousands of spies, but we never saw them. Occasionally there would be an eruption of activity somewhere in the world. Spiritual warfare is like that, it is clandestine, behind the scenes, but sometimes it erupts as Satan finds it necessary to oppose God. When Jesus came into the world, Satan opposed Him at every opportunity, but the Scriptures make it clear that Jesus has authority and power over the spiritual realm.

We find in Luke's next two stories of Luke 4:39 and 5:1-11 that Jesus had authority over illness and also nature. Jesus actually spoke to the fever (or what was causing it), and the illness left Simon's mother-in-law. Everyone who was sick with various diseases was coming to Jesus and He was exercising His authority over every one of them. At this point you must ask, as that audience did--Who is this guy? Who has authority and power over truth, angels, and all diseases? The best is yet to come.

Many of the miracles Jesus did were an exercise of His authority over nature. He stilled storms, calmed winds, and walked on water. In Luke 5:1-11, Jesus either created a great quantity of fish, or equally amazing, He called all the fish from other parts of the lake to Simon's boat. What is clear is that there had been no fish in the area, and suddenly there was "a great quantity of fish" by His command. Don't forget that when Luke wrote this story about Simon and Jesus, Simon was still alive and Luke actually spent a lot of time with Simon. In fact, Luke listed as sources for this Gospel "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word", and no doubt Peter was one of his sources. My point is that Luke would not make this stuff up with all the eyewitnesses still alive and able to refute his story. This authority over nature so impressed Simon Peter that he was overcome by his own unworthiness to even be in the presence of Jesus, as he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Jesus next revealed His authority over leprosy and paralysis in the following two stories in Luke 5. Leprosy was very significant because it had caused the people who had it to be ostracized from the community. Therefore Jesus was not only the Lord over this disease, but He was also reconciling the man to the community. Jesus introduced a unique element in the next story of Luke 5:17-26, by forgiving the paralytic's sins before He healed him. This connected His authority to heal with His authority to forgive. Ironically the Pharisees said, "Who is this man?...Who can forgive sins but God alone?" By giving visual objective proof through healing the paralytic, Jesus also proved His authority to forgive sins (Luke 5:24). This began a series of confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees.

The Sabbath Controversies

In first century Israel, Jewish life revolved around the Sabbath. The Hebrew word is Shabbat meaning "to cease" or to rest, and the English version is Sabbath. Immense tradition and lifestyle had developed from the simple command of Exodus 20:10, "you shall not do any work" on the seventh day of the week. God had intended it to be a day of rest and worship, but men had developed a repressive system of legalism. They had set up 39 categories of forbidden activities each with detailed explanations. Among these, reaping, threshing, and winnowing were forbidden, so in Luke 6:1 Jesus and His disciples find themselves accused of violating these laws. Jesus gave a two-fold reply. First of all, He gave an Old Testament precedent of David and his men starving and superseding the law by eating the bread in the Tabernacle. Next, Jesus gave them a theology lesson which established His authority over the law by saying, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath". Jesus authored the law, interprets the Law, and has authority over the Law. This same principle is established by another Sabbath confrontation in Luke 6:6-11. This time Jesus also confirmed it by healing the man on the Sabbath. Believe it or not, the Pharisees were enraged because their traditions dictated that you were not supposed to practice medicine on the Sabbath and healing fell under that category. The parallel account in Matt. 12 said they plotted to kill Him. Ironically, they were wanting to commit murder because Jesus had broken their traditions.

Authority to Choose and Send

After this, Jesus went out alone to pray, and when the sun came up, He decided who to choose to be an Apostle (Luke 6:13). This was His sovereign choice of the men who would be sent out to change the world. To me there are at least two remarkable things about this choice—none of these 12 were seeking this appointment, and I would have never chosen those guys. There were no nominations, no popularity contest, no voting, and there was no merit on their part. None of them was famous or rich or well connected. None of them was well educated like a scribe or priest or an elder. As the Sanhedrin would later say in Acts 4:13, "they were uneducated and untrained men". Amazingly, these very men (except Judas who was replaced), would turn the world upside down armed only with love and grace. How did they do it? It wasn't so much them as Who was with them. Part of the authority of God's call is that our weaknesses are actually opportunities for God to reveal His power. Paul said it well in 2 Cor. 12:9, "God has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'"

Conclusion

The entire human race has always been on a desperate search for truth, but has always come up short because they look for it in all the wrong places. God has chosen to reveal the absolute truth about human nature, meaning, purpose, forgiveness, and eternal life through Jesus. Unknowingly, we are all involved in a cosmic spiritual warfare that we can only win through Jesus. The world we live in is a dangerous place, and who knows when any one of us may fall victim to an accident or a disease, yet Jesus has authority over nature and disease. Each one of us has made mistakes, and as the Bible says "fallen short of the glory of God", but Jesus has the power and authority to forgive sins. All people have standards for living. We all have philosophies and laws we live by, certainly some better than others. Yet Jesus is the ultimate interpreter of the law, or as He said it, "the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath", and all the other laws of God as well. Since all this is true, isn't it time to make Jesus the Lord of your life? CHARLIE TAYLOR