

## *Notes on AUTHORITY*

By Jack Langford, Feb. 23, 2010

When Moses first stepped out to judge between two fighting Hebrews, he was, no doubt, surprised by the words from the one who did the wrong—“*Who made you a prince and a judge over us?*” Moses had taken it for granted that they would understand his position on their behalf by having previously killed an Egyptian taskmaster (Acts 7:24, 25). However, killing an Egyptian who was afflicting them was one thing; taking authority over Hebrew brethren in an inter-tribal quarrel was another! Obviously his authority was not going to be accepted at that time. Some forty years later, when Moses had the credentials of very powerful miraculous signs, his brethren finally acquiesced to his God-given authority.

Yet, after the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, providing miraculous water and bread for hundreds of thousands of people, the fabulous and terrifying phenomenon at Mount Sinai and many other miraculous events as well, there were still brethren who came to display contempt for Moses’ God-given authority. It is actually very hard to believe that anyone would challenge the authority of Moses after all that had happened. However, there came a time when this challenge was not only real, but it was sinister and powerful because it was promulgated by other brethren who also had high positions of recognized authority of their own.

### *Authority Against Authority!*

Korah, Dathan and Abiram were not just little peons who stood on the outside edge of the camp of Israel. They were all recognized elders; Korah, Dathan and Abiram may have stood with Moses on Mount Sinai to be privileged to view the God of Israel (Exo. 24:1, 9). In addition, there were also “*two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, men of renown*” (Num. 16:2), who stood with them. And in addition to that, they proclaimed that “*all the congregation was holy, every one of them, and the LORD was among them. Why then do you (Moses and Aaron) exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?*” (Num. 24:3). So these men challenging Moses, so as to speak, “put all their cards on the table.” To say the least, it was a very, very impressive hand. Probably anyone else faced with this array of power and authority would have said, “O.K., gentlemen, it is all yours! I’ll just take a leave of absence right about now.” And, indeed, they apparently thought Moses would wilt in the face of such shocking odds.

Not so, with the “humblest man on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). The amazing fact was that Moses as a person was actually lowly and meek in character. He was not *self-seeking* of authority. Now this fact actually gave him an advantage. He knew quite well that the authority he possessed was not something he assumed in order to assert himself over others. The authority Moses had was that which Almighty God had chosen to delegate. Therefore, in faithfulness to God, Who gave him that authority, he would simply place the outcome of this confrontation in God’s hands. And, as we all know, it did not take God very long to solve the problem!

Without going into any of the details of this confrontation, I want to simply observe that the solution was basically—the man who gave the truth of God is the man

who has God's authority! Moses gave and represented the truth of God! This is pure and simple! It doesn't make any difference how many qualified, authoritarian big shots there were, nor how large was the whole congregation, nor how "holy" was the congregation. All of this is very impressive, but that is not the basis upon which God designates the final authority. Conclusion—get away from those who merely assert their authority, and follow the one who speaks God's Word.

*"The Magisterium"*

"You don't think you are competent to correct the Magisterium, do you?" So stated a Roman Catholic Staff Apologist, after I challenged "the Church's" belief on a certain subject that has been held over the centuries. The man had assumed that I was a Roman Catholic because I knew so much about their liturgical traditions. Therefore, after all his other arguments proved to be faulty in trying to defend an error, he believed I would meekly wilt before the thought of such a stupendous insult as to think I could correct one of the almighty traditions of that august body. "The Magisterium," you understand, is the official designation for the "Teaching Authority" of the Roman Catholic Church. The Pope himself sits at the head of the Magisterium and you simply cannot top this in their thinking. Of course this is very handy for Roman Catholics because it means they do not have to do *any thinking*—just rely upon the Magisterium—let them do the thinking for you. After all, the laity has been taught the inspired dictum from Saint Paul that the "*Church of the living God is the Pillar and Mainstay of the truth*" (I Timothy 3:15). Therefore, they are told whatever "The Church" says through its "Magisterium" must be "The Truth;" therefore, they say "*Hear The Church.*"

Of course, they are ignorant about two important facts. First of all, that splendid "Church" the Apostle Paul is talking about is altogether different from the Roman Catholic Church. They are two radically different institutions. And secondly, the "truth," that the Church is the "pillar and mainstay" of, is both separate and distinct from the Church that supports it. In addition, "the truth" is also freely available and understandable for all believers and not just the leaders in the Church. After all, the Bible tells us the Church is not just the leaders, but all believers everywhere. And the truth that it bears witness to is available to all. Let me explain this further—

The Church Paul was speaking about is described as being presented to her Husband and "Head," Jesus Christ, as a "Chaste Virgin" (Ephesians 5:27 & II Corinthians 11:2). The "Word of God" is literally "the bath of water" whereby the Church is cleansed for her presentation to Her Lord (Eph. 5:26). Whereas, the other institution is referred to as being "the Great Whore" and "Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of Abominations of the Earth" (Revelation 17:1 & 5). The liquid the Magisterium in this institution safeguards is the liquor that has made the nations of earth "drunk with the wine of her immoralities" (Rev. 17:2).

Yes, indeed, Rome says "Hear the Church!" However, they actually mean by that "the Magisterium." In contrast, Christ the Head of the true Church, says, "He that is of God hears God's Word" (John 8:47). And again, Christ said to the religious leaders of His day, "You make the Word of God of none effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:13). So it is that every blood-bought believer in Jesus Christ today can have the privilege of being "*light bearers in the world, holding forth the Word of Life*" (Philippians 2:15, 16).

In this way the Church is “the pillar and mainstay of the truth.” And, it is “The Truth” that must be heard, not the institution that upholds or publishes it.

Now you may be surprised to realize that many times real Christians and real leaders in the “body of Christ” fall into the same assumption. Though they are by no means the august pontifical “Magisterium,” yet they feel secure in their conclusions by the fact that “all the leaders agree on this subject.” Now such agreement can be great, but that, in and of itself, absolutely does not mean that what they agree to is the truth!

*Authority in the Church which is Christ’s body*

Authority in the Church, “the Body of Christ,” is a beautiful and proper order for the functioning of that divine organism. For that first generation of Christians the authority directing them was actually four-fold: *first*, and foremost, they had the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit of God to miraculously and supernaturally guide them at almost every turn of events (Acts has sometimes been named “The Acts of The Holy Spirit” & see 15:28); *secondly*, they had the living, united authority of the Apostles who had been direct witnesses of Christ’s entire ministry (Acts 2:42; 15:2, 6, & 23); *thirdly*, all recognize they had the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures which still governed their lives under the Law and as examples in godly living; and *fourthly*, they carefully directed every new assembly to recognize mature men among them as being shepherds to assist and minister to the flock (see again Acts 15:2, 6, & 23; then Acts 14:22, 23; etc.).

By the second generation (or the first forty years of the Church) the inspired Greek Scriptures had been completed. This included the four Gospels, the book of Acts, the Epistles of Paul and the Jewish-Christian letters. These were not only made available to all, but they also became the basis upon which the Church of Jesus Christ would function in all its various services. This was the Church’s Constitution and “By-Laws.” Shortly thereafter the book of Revelation was made available. No one had to wait for the so-called “Church Counsels” of the fourth century to determine what was or was not the Word of God. And much later, “Sola Scriptura,” became the banner for the Reformation.

Jesus Christ was the Head of the Church and Savior of the body. When He ascended on high and was seated at the right hand of the Father, “He gave gifts unto men...And He gave some Apostles, some Prophets (we recognize these first two positions as of foundational importance, Eph.2:20), some Evangelists, some Pastors and Teachers” (Eph. 4:8 & 11). The last three positions are given for service to the whole Church to function at large. They travel to the various congregations to serve special needs. They are ministering brethren like Timothy, Titus and Silas, whom Paul often sent from place to place as needed. In *evangelization*, people are saved and local congregations are founded. In *pastoring*, the young Christians are nurtured and churches are guided. In *teaching*, Christians are educated and churches are strengthened to maturity. Sometimes these gifts are all shared by a minister and sometimes a minister may emphasize one of them, such as evangelism or teaching in his service.

As to the local congregations, as pointed out above, there were to be local older, mature brethren to serve the saints as overseers or shepherds and also in practical service, sometimes distinguished as “deacons” (see Philippians 1:2). No doubt, at the beginning some of the recognition of such leaders was miraculous. Later, Paul wrote careful qualifications for such positions—I Tim. 3:1-13 & Titus 1:5-9.

### *Exhortations to Recognition and Obedience*

It is to these various offices that many exhortations are given to the saints to recognize them and obey them in light of their God-given responsibilities. It is, of course, to likewise be understood that this recognition is *conditional* upon their own walk and teaching accurately the things of Christ. Let us look first at the exhortations—

I Thess. 1:6, “And you became *followers of us* and of *the Lord*...”

5:12,13 “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over (lit. Greek— *leading*) you *in the Lord* and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.”

II Thess. 3:7 “For yourselves know how you ought to *follow us*...”

3:9 “...not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an *example* of how you ought to *follow us*.”

I Cor. 4:16 “Therefore I urge you *imitate me*.”

11:1 “*Imitate me*, just as I also *imitate Christ*.”

16:15,16 “I urge you, brethren, know the household of Stephanas, that is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints, that you *submit* to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.”

Philip. 3:17 “Brethren, join in *following my example*, and note those who *walk*, as you have *us for a pattern*...”

4:9 “The things which you have learned and received and heard and saw *in me*, these do...”

I Tim. 4:12 “Let no one despise your youth, but be an *example* to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

Heb. 13:7 “Remember those who rule (lit. *leading*) over you, who have spoken to you *the Word of God*, whose *faith follow*, considering the outcome of their conduct.”

13:17 “Obey (Lit. be *persuaded of*) those who rule over (lit. *are leading*) you, and be *submissive*, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.”

I Pet. 5:1-3 “The elders who are among you I exhort...Shepherd the flock which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; *not as being lords over* those entrusted to you, but being *examples* to the flock...”

These are beautiful and proper exhortations that every believer should rejoice in the privilege of obeying. I remember vividly following older brethren that were leading in assemblies. I absolutely had to support them. I might even say, I was forced to! Why did I feel such compulsion? Was it because they demanded it? Absolutely not! They were ministering God’s Word! Therefore, I was joyously following Christ’s order.

### *A Real Shock in My Experience*

A real shock in my own experience came a few years ago when I and a few others began to realize that younger leadership were making expressions that would lead us to suspect they actually were teaching unqualified submission and obedience. At first, I dismissed this as merely the fact they were only emphasizing one aspect of submission. After all, when some pointedly responded to certain statements they made by quoting Paul's exhortation to "follow him—as he followed Christ," and that we must "prove all things," they would answer that they believed that also.

But then we began to hear one message after another which would touch on the subject in an unqualified manner. One time I openly tempered what this brother was saying and it caught him by surprise I guess, because he only remained silent for a moment, and then nodded agreement and went on. The minister was obviously stung.

The passage that has been most often quoted by certain ministers in our assemblies, which I noted being used in the last several years, has been *Hebrews 13:7 & 17*. As I stated before, I had become suspicious of how it was being used for some time, because it was most often talked about in an unqualified sense. Sometimes it was used to mean what has been called "blind obedience," or "whether you see it or not." It was actually hard for me to believe that this was happening in light of all the exhortations in past years for brethren to "check up on what they believe to be right," or as I Thessalonians 5:21 says, "prove all things, hold fast that which is good."

#### *Hebrews 13:7 & 17 (from the KJV or the NKJV)*

**"Remember** those who **rule over** you, who have spoken the Word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct."

**"Obey** those who **rule over** you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account."

Now this is a beautiful passage of Scripture, and it is exhorting believers to properly respect the leadership and make their jobs easier for them. I sincerely wanted to always do this as an encouragement to them. I wanted them to know that I was behind them and encouraging others as well to fall in line for Christ's sake. However, the passage can obviously be misused by one who comes to usurp authority over one of God's flocks. It has been done throughout history.

In studying the passage carefully we will find that it actually does not demand unqualified obedience. Paul's words are inspired and very carefully used.

First, the word "rule" in our King James or New King James is better translated "**lead**" in both cases. And most all new translations do this. The Greek word is *hegeomai*, which means "to lead or guide" (see Strong's Concordance or W.E. Vine). This is more in line with what a shepherd does—he leads the flock, and as Peter states "not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but as examples to the flock."

Second, the word "Obey" can be accurately translated "**to be persuaded, or won over.**" This is taken from the Greek word *peitho*, which literally means "to persuade." Again see Strong or W.E.Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, which is coded to Strong's Concordance and is very helpful to the lay person. Consequently,

W.E. Vine makes an important statement regarding this passage—“The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion.” This means, of course, there is an important *qualifier* to the obedience or submission.

Third, verse 7 plainly gives the *qualifier*. Following the lead of a minister, is on the basis that these leaders “*have spoken to you the Word of God!*” In other words, the inspired text is indirectly telling us, if these leaders have not spoken to you the Word of God, then by all means, don’t “*be persuaded*” to follow them! As Christ our Lord has stated, “*He that is of God heareth God’s Word*” (John 8:47). And again Christ plainly said “*MY sheep hear My voice*” (John 10:3-5), and “*a stranger they will not follow.*” When a minister is giving the truth of Christ, it is as if Christ is speaking, and we should most certainly follow the truth that is given. Now this is a firm principle and is taught everywhere in the Word of God.

#### *My own reservation to unqualified obedience*

Needless to say, it was known that I had firm reservations about how the minister was using Scripture on the subject of submission and obedience. Therefore, in the last meeting they called for me (ten men were present as witnesses) I was pointedly asked the question by the younger minister, who carefully framed his question in the following manner, “Mr. Langford, can you give me just one Scripture that qualifies ‘obedience’ ONLY if you see and agree with what the leader is saying?”

I did not care how subtle was his question, I responded firmly that “it is a basic principle taught everywhere in the Scriptures, that you ONLY follow those who are preaching the Word of God. This is a fundamental truth.” I further said, “The best illustration I know of is what we have always used—Acts 17:11—‘*They of Berea were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*’”

I could hardly believe my ears, but this younger minister responded, “*But that was just the first time they met with Paul. After that they would not need to search the Scriptures.*” I did not waste any time in rebuking this perversion. I said, “it would not make any difference whether this was the first time or the thousandth time they heard Paul. This is encouraged in the Scriptures as a ‘*noble*’ principle.” I further said, “Your doctrine, if it continues, is taking this assembly right back to mother Rome in their philosophy—just follow the Magisterium. A believer is never told to walk in someone else’s faith—but in ‘The Faith once delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3).” If one is preaching that “Faith,” we should all follow! If they are not, we should not follow!

#### *Unbiblical Authority*

Now it just so happened that this younger minister had just acknowledged what he had done. “Five years ago I created a man-made religious organization (named “Jeff Grove Ministries”), but I am not going to (publicly) use that terminology because of the evil connotation in it.” In accordance with this, the assembly had now been in operation for the last five years, in reality and as far as the I.R.S. was concerned, under the name and organization of “Jeff A. Grove Ministries, Inc.” The local church funds were all thus designated to that organization and all the variety of ministry and services to that

congregation was in the name of, and under the auspices of, “Jeff A. Grove Ministries, Inc.” according to the organizational incorporation papers.

I had been vigorously protesting this, but privately to the leadership, for the last five years as well. The reason I was protesting was because these very same brethren who were on the “Board of Directors” of the “Jeff A. Grove Ministries, Inc.” were also saying publicly before the congregation that they “are not building anything man-made in religion.” I knew good and well that this was a lie and I told them so several times in writing. I finally made a public statement to this effect and it so shocked the congregation that I was told to be quiet and sit down. The congregation did not know that they had created a man-made religious organization. That was the reason I was called to this meeting by these brethren. They wanted me to retract this public statement which I refused to do because I and they knew it was true!

Now it also just so happened that another highly respected brother, named Bob Harrison, had written a long Bible study entitled “*Authority, Order and Motivation.*” I had just read it very carefully and noted that right in the middle of the study brother Harrison made the following important statement (italics and underlining mine, J.L.)—

“Care should be taken here to properly discriminate what God is doing from *what man is doing*. God does not authorize or put in place those in authority in religious organizations that men are making. A saint that is in a sect is not under any authority there that God recognizes... So the discussion of authority in this study only is applicable to what God is doing. It applies only to viable representations of what God has ordained and cannot be accurately applied to the *dead works of men.*” (Page 11., as was posted on [www.bibletruths.org](http://www.bibletruths.org)., 8/20/06.)

Therefore, I stated before these brethren, “In light of Bob Harrison’s observation, I am no longer under your authority since you have chosen to operate under a religious organization that you have admitted men have made.” Immediately, a brother named Tom Collins, (who had been named on the Board of Directors of the Jeff Grove Ministries Corporation) spoke up and charged me—“Don’t you tell that to anybody!” Just imagine such a charge by a man who professes truth and godliness as a bishop!

This brother was obviously stung by their own inconsistency and compromising that he made such a charge. Of course, since I am no longer under their authority, I have no fear of openly stating the truth of the matter. (In addition, since I would not retract my public statement, I was expelled from that assembly.)

Today in Christendom, sectarianism has manifested itself in the ultimate fragmentations—“Ministry Churches.” Of course, these are most often named after a particular minister, and these creations are no less sectarian than the Methodist or Baptist.

#### *The Final Authority!*

As to some type of “Final Authority,” let it be understood that God has not ordained final authority to be deposited into the hands of—(No. 1) “Human Tradition,” no matter how rich and deep is that tradition; (No. 2) nor to any of the claims of “private revelation” of any individual, no matter how brilliant, no matter what affirmations or

attempted proof they may offer; and (No. 3) nor into the hands of “the authority of Good Men,” no matter how pious, good or numerous these men might appear to be.

It should always be clear and understood that the “final authority” that God has ordained for all the members of the Church to look to in order for proper judgment, for discretion in doctrine, and in order to know when to follow leadership, and when not to follow leadership, is the Inspired Word of God. The Holy Scriptures have been completed, deposited and made available for all congregations to be guided and directed through. This is most vital, because the apostle Paul warned that sometimes leadership itself will spawn divisive and erroneous teachings for self-serving interests—Acts 20:28-32. Read it again! In this very warning Paul makes it clear that the Word of God is the refuge from such error—

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.  
For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among *yourselves* men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to *the Word of His Grace*, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

In conclusion, the Scriptures are always held out as the governing document and principle of authority upon which we base all conclusions and judgments in all our walk and conduct—Acts 17:11; John 8:47; Isa. 8:20; I Thess. 2:13; I Tim. 6:3; II Tim. 3:16, 17 & 4:2-4 and Heb. 13:7; etc.

Christ stated the principle in a most beautiful way—“I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11). And on that basis He further stated the following—

“And the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.  
Yet they will by no means follow a stranger,  
But will flee from him,  
For they do not know the voice of strangers.”  
—John 10: 4 & 5

Therefore, when a man like the apostle Paul says “follow me even as I follow Christ” (I Cor. 11:1), and he demonstrates that principle in his life and teaching, I follow, because I know in reality I am hearing the voice of Christ and following Him.

*The End*