

Understanding Authority

Understanding the will of God does not require a degree in theology. It requires a heart that is sensitive to the instructions of our Maker.

“I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.’ When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, ‘I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!’” (Lk. 7:7-9).



In navigating our relationship with our Creator, there is no greater topic that we can explore than the concept of *authority*. If He is our King and we are His subjects, it is imperative that we learn how to respect His authority.

Recognizing that truth, brethren through the years have published a vast corpus of material on the subject of “How to Establish Authority.” Using charts, diagrams, and Biblical illustrations, these works provide a kind of decoder ring to help the serious Bible student master the task of knowing the will of God. Useful information can be gleaned from these sources. But there is a lot of obfuscation as well. Some of this material borders on human law-making (“The Law of Materiality,” “The Law of Competence,”

“The Law of Limited Application,” etc.). In our quest to leave no stone unturned, this approach to authority veers dangerously close to the theology of the scribes and Pharisees, who “bind heavy burdens, hard to bear” on unsophisticated followers of God (Matt. 23:4). Just as the Pharisees turned God’s simple Sabbath law into a maze of regulations that subverted the original intent of the Law, we, too, tend to make the subject of authority more complicated and oppressive than God intends it to be.

In this incident in the life of Christ, the centurion had a perspective on authority that cut through all the legalese and went straight to the heart of the matter: “I say to one man, ‘go’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” In these few words, the centurion tells us everything we need to know about authority. In its most fundamental form, authority is simply *God telling us what to do*. Simple declarative statements define the boundaries; examples clarify and inform those boundaries; occasionally we may need to “connect the dots” from multiple pieces of evidence to draw an unavoidable inference. But at the end of the day, it’s a fairly simple process of study and reasoning that even an uneducated farm laborer can perform. And he can do this without a six-month study in a workbook on authority.

But if we look at this story closely, we’ll notice a deeper prerequisite to understanding God’s authority. The centurion—a leader who was accustomed to ordering others around—admitted that “I did not even think myself worthy to come to You” (v. 7). This is *humility* in action, an awareness of one’s inadequacy to chart his own path. In far too many cases, people over-complicate Biblical truth by their prideful insistence on doing things their own way. Their self-will is an impediment to understanding.

When Jesus heard the plea of this Roman soldier, He was amazed. “I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel.” The Jewish scholars, with all their theological erudition, no doubt scoffed at this Gentile as an illiterate and misguided primitive. Yet Jesus saw in this man’s simple expression of trust a faith that exceeded all the learning of his religious superiors. That’s what God is looking for still today: People who trust His word to shine a light on their path through life.

— David King