Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Preacher's Authority
Scripture: Titus 2:15
Code: 56-22

Preparing to minister the Word of God week in and week out is such a great adventure. And I cherish every precious hour that I have to study God's Word. I can only plan so much and then I find myself under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit and sometimes my best plans have been laid aside at His bidding. And that's even a more wonderful adventure. I had planned to preach to you this morning on Titus chapter 2, just the last verse, verse 15, and then go right in to chapter 3 and cover several verses that really associate very well with verse 15. As I began to prepare for the message early in the week, I started by reading through verse 15 of Titus chapter 2 and I never got pass that verse. I read it and it hit me like a thunderbolt. And I read it again and again and by the time I had finished reading it I had memorized it inadvertently and that meant that everywhere I went and whatever I was doing it kept going over and over in my mind. "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority, let no one disregard you." And it just hit me that this is a statement about the preacher's authority...speak and exhort and reprove with all authority, let no one disregard you.

That is such a strong statement about authority. And the longer I thought about it and meditated on it, the stronger mandate it became to my own heart, to every preacher. The more I thought about it the more searching and the more compelling it became. And I began to think about the fact that the preacher is not a story teller. He is not really theologizing. He is not sharing insights. He's not counseling. He's not even just passing on facts. If he does what he is called to do he is speaking with authority...in fact, with all authority. That is to say all authority available to him is brought to bear in the exercise of his speaking and exhorting and reproving. And no one is allowed to justify or rationalize or evade what he says.

To realize that one has such authority is on the one hand exhilarating and on the other hand frightening. I began to think about what an unusual God-given privilege preaching is. And because it carries this kind of authority, what an immense responsibility it is.

To go a little bit deeper I began to look closely at the word "authority." It's the word epitagein Greek. It appears a number of times in the New Testament. Every other time it is translated commandment or command. This is the only place the translators chose to use the word authority but it does convey the idea. It has the idea of commanding. The one who speaks, Paul says here to Titus, is to speak in the tone of commanding. We're not making suggestions. We're not just giving insights. We're not quote/unquote sharing thoughts. We're not passing on facts. We're not clarifying doctrine. All of those things may be components but the end effect is to command and to command really three

things...that you hear, which implies to understand; that you believe; and that you obey. Speaking should bring about the first, that is that you hear. Exhorting should assist that you believe. And reproving should assist that you obey. So we are exercising a very unusual responsibility, speaking to you with authority so that you understand and you believe and you obey.

Paul said much the same back in verse 1 of chapter 2 of Titus, although not with the mention of authority, when he said, "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." And what does that involve? Telling the older men to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith and love and perseverance. That's a command. And telling the older women to be reverent and not malicious gossips and not enslaved to much wine and teaching what is good. That's a command. And telling the younger women to love their husbands, love their children, be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, subject to their husbands that the Word of God may not be dishonored. That is a command. And then command the young people to be sensible and you set an example of what that means in good deeds with purity and doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach and so forth. And then you command the bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, verse 9, well pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering but showing all good faith.

Preaching is commanding. It is speaking and exhorting and reproving with all authority and not allowing anyone to get around what you have said, periphroneo, to think around it, to rationalize, justify, evade, elude. Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:11, "Command and teach these things." And then he said, "Be an example of them" in the next verse, and don't let anybody look down on your youth. Don't let anybody say to you you're too young to tell us that, you have the authority. Paul is telling Titus, and I think all of us who preach, that the preacher is one who commands, who must command. There is a teaching component, there is a theologizing component, there is a component of sympathy and empathy and identification, but in the end all of that leads to the point of command. A preacher then is to speak with full authority, demanding that people hear and believe and obey.

And, of course, the model of all of that would be our Lord Jesus Christ. Go back to Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7 verse 29, Jesus had just completed the Sermon on the Mount and the people were frankly amazed at His teaching and what amazed them verse 29 says was that He was teaching them as one having authority and not as their scribes. Scribes had viewpoints. Scribes had opinions but Jesus had authority. He commanded. He demanded.

The gospel of Mark, Mark wants to be sure that no one misses this note of Jesus' preaching so in Mark chapter 1 and verse 22 after Jesus had entered the synagogue and began to speak there, verse 22 of Mark 1 says they were amazed at His teaching for He was teaching them as one having authority and not as the scribes. Again the remarkable note about Jesus was He was not offering insights, He was not offering viewpoints, He was not giving suggestions and perspectives, He was commanding with authority.

In Luke's gospel chapter 4 and verse 36, amazement came on all the people and they began discussing with one another saying, "What is this message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out." Everything about Him was powerful and authoritative and commanding and demanding. And in John 7:46 they said, "Never a man spake like this man."

It all came to a head, this matter of authority. In Mark 11:28 the leaders of Israel came to Jesus one day and they said to Him simply this, "By what authority do You do what You do?" What is Your authority? You never quote a rabbi. You never quote a professor or a teacher. You never identify with any Jewish school of thought. Where do You get your authority? You not only command men but You command demons. Where do You get Your authority?

Was it the same kind of authority that they had? No. Where did the Jews get their authority? Two thousand years of tradition. Jesus paid no attention to that. In fact, He said, "You have heard it said by them of old such and such, but I say unto you...." He rejected their two thousand years of tradition. Was His authority the current Jewish theology? No. He went contrary and across the grain of all of their extant theology. Was His authority some...some noble rabbi of the past? No. He paid no attention to any rabbinical teaching of the past except to set Himself against it. Was His authority the populous? That is did He speak for the majority? No, not at all. Was there some current obscure teacher somewhere who had discovered some things which Jesus was now taking and sharing? No. Was His authority that He attended some school somewhere and sat at the feet of some erudite individuals? No. Was His authority in His style or His looks or His voice or His skill as a communicator? Was it in some office that He bore or some title that He had acquired? No.

What was His authority? They wanted to know. How could He speak like this? There weren't any footnotes in His sermons. They didn't quote anybody. And everything He said was commanding and demanding and final and absolute. He gave the answer and it's recorded for us in John's gospel, look at chapter 7. This is where His authority came from. John chapter 7 verse 14, "It was now the midst of the feast and Jesus went to the temple and began to teach." And the Jews were marveling again because He was so learned but He had never been educated. They were overwhelmed at His erudition. They knew He was learned. They also knew He hadn't been to their schools. "Jesus therefore answered them and He said, My teaching is not Mine but His who sent Me. If any man is willing to do His will he shall know of the teaching whether it is of God or whether I speak for Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory, he who is seeking the glory of the one who sent him, he is true and there is no unrighteousness in him."

What Jesus said was very simple. My authority is this, I speak the words of God. My teaching is not Mine, it is His who sent Me. Dear friends, I submit to you that if that was Jesus' pattern and He was deity, how could any man assume to teach anything of his own? If I speak, it must be the Word of

God.

Chapter 8 of John's gospel, just to make certain that no one misses this, Jesus answers these queries repeatedly with basically the same answer. Verse 28 of John 8, "Jesus therefore said, When you lift up the Son of Man then you will know that I am He and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me." Verse 38, "I speak the things which I've seen with My Father." Verse 40, "But as it is you're seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God." Chapter 12 verse 49, "I do not speak on My own initiative but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment what to say and what to speak and I know that His commandment is eternal life therefore the things I speak I speak just as the Father has told Me." There, my friend, is the preacher's mandate, is it not? Then you can say what verse 48 says, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings has one who judges him, the Word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day." If I speak for God, you better listen because if you don't hear, believe and obey, the Word which you heard will judge you.

You see, the preacher has authority if and only if he speaks the Word of God. Let me say it even stronger. The preacher has no authority outside the Bible...none. I have no authority beyond Scripture, no preacher does. The only authority I have is the Word of God. To preach then is to preach the Word of God. To preach the Word of God is to preach with authority. To preach with authority is to command. Therefore, to preach is to command. And that's what preachers are supposed to do.

Bruce Shelley(?), a church historian, wrote it, "If God lives as the followers of Christ assert, then man's existence is transformed into a destiny not of his own making. His life and liberty are suddenly circumscribed with the will of God," end quote.

Men are under the authority of God. The commands of that authority are given to us in the Bible and in the Bible alone and preachers are to proclaim that and only that. And so when Paul writes to Titus and says, "These things that I have been giving you, these commands that come authoritatively from God in chapter 1, chapter 2 and even more to come in chapter 3, these things which fit sound doctrine, all of this revelation from God you are to speak and you are to exhort and you are to reprove with all authority and let no one disregard you." He is giving the mandate for every preacher. We preach with authority. We command men by Scripture to hear, believe and obey. That is our authority.

That is a very very central and essential matter in preaching. We are not story tellers. We are not just counselors. We are not just purveyors of fact. We are commanders who stand in the place of God reiterating His own commands. This is our authority and our only authority. I'll say that again. Our only authority, I have no authority beyond Scripture. I may have some practical insight, I might have some good ideas, nothing more. I have no authority. I can only speak for God when I speak

His Word.

Now some have misunderstood this, many, and misrepresented it. And I want to dwell on this concept for a little bit because I think it will be helpful for you to get a perspective on this.

There are many today frankly who go beyond the bounds of biblical authority. And they imagine themselves to have another kind of authority beyond Scripture which is an illusion if not a blasphemy. Such mistaken authority, I suppose, could fall into four categories...okay? And I'll give you these four and you could probably think of some other sub-categories to these but I think these would maybe sum up the four general categories of mistaken authority that you see in the framework of Christianity.

First of all, the false authority from personal power...personal power. Some men think that they have in themselves because they are preachers some Messianic or some apostolic power and that they can do what Jesus did and they can do what the Apostles did. You see this particularly in the "name it and claim it" group of the Charismatic Movement or in the "signs and wonders" segment of it or in the spiritual warfare dimension. These people who believe they have a Messianic and Apostolic authority over Satan, demons and even holy angels can be called to their bidding and even God can be cornered and things demanded out of Him so that they assume themselves to have some great personal supernatural power certainly beyond Scripture. And you hear them often commanding Satan, speaking to Satan, demanding him to do this or do that or stay away or go away or tie himself up, you hear them speaking to demons demanding and commanding demons, you see them taking authority over disease over here and authority over illness and we take authority over cancer and authority over death and authority over angels and we call the angels to this and we...we take authority, as it were, over our rights before God and they are even impinging upon the freedom of God to operate within the framework of His own will and demand that God do for them what they assume He has to do. They are commanding where they have no authority. They are commanding where they have no jurisdiction whatsoever.

That should have been readily apparent by a very cursory reading of the New Testament. In Matthew chapter 10 obviously Jesus had this power but He, of course, was God. It says that He gave this power to the twelve disciples. In Matthew chapter 10 He summoned His twelve disciples, gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. So He gave to the disciples the authority or the power to heal disease and to cast out demons. In Mark's gospel, chapter 3, we have the similar record in verse 15 that He gave to them the responsibility to preach and to have authority to cast out demons. And you find again in Luke's gospel chapter 9 and verse 1 the very same thing...He called the Twelve together, gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases and sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to perform healing.

This was for Christ to do and for the Apostles to do. This was not for everyone. This belonged to them. These are what Paul in his letter to the Corinthians called the signs of an Apostle. And the best proof I know of that is found in a wonderful little vignette in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Acts. And here the Apostle Paul is doing miracles. I mean, they are just amazing in volume in the nineteenth chapter of Acts, verse 11 Paul is performing extraordinary miracles and by the power of God, of course, handkerchiefs and aprons are carried from his body to the sick and the disease has left them and evil spirits went out. So he was doing exactly what Apostles had been given the power to do, he being the last of the Apostles, sort of out of due season, as he says.

But verse 13, "Some of the Jewish exorcists who went from place to place attempting to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches," so here were these guys going around trying to do what Paul did in the name of Jesus. They were seven in number, seven sons of somebody named Sceva who was a Jewish chief priest and they were doing this. And they had this illusion of authority based on their personal power. And I love verse 15, "And the evil spirit answered these seven guys and said to them, I recognize Jesus and I know about Paul but who are you?" What an incredible rebuttal. If you think we have to react to you, you've got another think coming, friend. "And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded." The demon gave the man strength and he ripped up all seven of them. Jesus I know and Paul I know but who are you guys? The illusion of apostolic authority.

Some even think they have personal power to forgive sin. You find this in the Roman Catholic Church. They think they can do what Mark 2:10 says Jesus does, He has the power to forgive sin. They think that they can forgive the sins of people, they can grant them absolution through some mechanical means like confession or the saying of so many rosary beads or some other mechanism that brings about ablutions from sin and the church. They think that somehow they can say some incantations over an individual just prior to their death called Extreme Unction and therefore their sins are removed from them. They assume an authority over sin that they do not have. This kind of authority, this elusive kind of authority, this that is nothing more than a fantasy comes from pride and self-confidence or some official title or some official office that they imagine themselves to have associated with such divine authority. It is foolish, it is false, it is proud, it is illusory, it is non- existent. They have no authority over demons, no man does. They have no authority over Satan, holy angels, God, disease, illness, death. The only authority we have in the post-apostolic era is the Word of God, our authority starts with Genesis and it ends with Revelation.

There's a second mistake in area of authority that is prevalent today and it has been for centuries and that is church power...not only personal power but church power. Many judge the church to be the authority in spiritual matters. This is, of course, very graphically illustrated in the Roman Catholic Church but it is also an illusion, it is a false and destructive attitude. It allows them to command where there is no jurisdiction, to make demands on people that they have no right to make and to say

things in the name of God that God is not saying and not supporting.

The Roman Catholic Church tries through the years, through the centuries across the globe wherever it has influence to take over the souls of men, to take authority over their souls, to take authority over nations, governments, even the world and to exercise that authority. Their authority has never been limited to the Bible, you have to understand that. For the most part, Catholics will affirm their faith and confidence in the Bible and say it is the Word of God but their authority though it includes the Bible does not end at the Bible, and they have authoritative interpretations of the Bible given by the church which sit in judgment on a proper understanding of the Bible. Their authority goes beyond the Bible and is contained in what they have called historically the magisterium. This...this accumulated data that has arisen from popes and bulls and councils and creeds and articles of faith and excathedra pronouncements, etc., and it all comes together is known as the body of tradition or the magisterium. It is based on apostolic succession which means that every pope is a successor to the Apostles' office and is equal in ranking with Peter and so when the Pope speaks excathedra, that is out of his chair or out of his throne, he has papal infallibility and thus he speaks revelation.

Somehow that apostolic succession, that revelatory miracle still goes on through church councils and through articles of faith and special pronouncements. And all of this is collected in the magisterium and is extrabiblical data and it is binding and authoritative and it is commanded as if it were the very Word of God. That's where you get doctrines like purgatory that are not in the Bible, it's in the traditions that say that when people die they go into a waiting place where they're mildly tortured and hopefully they can do enough things while they're there to get out or somebody alive can light enough candles to get them out. That's where you get things like the perpetual virginity of Mary, that she was a virgin constantly, that she never bore any children even though the Bible says she did. And the virgin birth of Mary, not only the virgin birth of Jesus Christ comes out of the magisterium, the tradition, that's where you get the idea of the co-redemptrix work of Mary, that she's a co-redemptrix with Jesus Christ, redeeming the world from sin. That comes out of the tradition. That's where you get the veneration and the worship of angels, the veneration and worship of saints, the intercessory work of saints, praying to them to plead with God, praying to Mary to plead with God to take away your sin. All of that, none of it found in the Bible, is found in the magisterium or the tradition and is equally authoritative to the Bible because the church says it is and the church has that authority.

The Roman Catholic Church then in its own eyes is the final authority and has every right to command people to do things that are not in the Scripture, to believe things that are not in the Scripture because they are the authority. In fact, the Bible can be overridden by the church, to put it simply, the Word is under the church...the Word is under the church.

The Eastern Orthodox Church which is known as the Russian Orthodox Church, the Eastern Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, any of those branches of the orthodox church, and there are others, also claim the same authority. They claim that the church authority extends beyond the Bible. They

too have a magisterium, they reject the papacy, that's why the eastern and the western split, that and some of the things involved in the worshiping of idols. The eastern church does not have idols, they have pictures instead of statues, those kinds of things. But the eastern church said that the revelation of God is still being given authoritatively through the church by means of church councils and church fathers. Most particularly they said seven infallible ecumenical councils occurred, the first one in Nicaea in 325, the last one in Nicaea again in 787 and out of those seven infallible councils come the tradition and the tradition is equally binding. They would agree then with Rome that the church can speak infallibly not only from the Scripture but from its own pronouncements and its own traditions and its own articles of faith. In fact, they if anything sit in judgment on the Bible.

True Christianity has always said the Word is not under the church, the church is under the Word. And there is no authority past the pages of Scripture. God is the final authority and God has revealed the commands of His authority through divine revelation by the prophets and the Apostles who wrote the Bible and now declares that that is what is to be preached authoritatively. That's why Paul says to Timothy, 2 Timothy 4:2, very simple sentence, "Preach the Word." There isn't anything else that is authoritative. The ultimate authority is God. All binding spiritual commands come from Him through the Scripture alone, not through popes and councils and fathers and creeds and articles and traditions. That was the very error of Israel. Jesus said, "You have substituted the tradition of men for the commandments of God."

So, the only authoritative word from God is the Bible. And that is what we preach. And when we preach it, we command. No word outside the Bible is authoritative in the realm of the soul. Did you hear that? No word outside the Bible is authoritative in the realm of the soul...not the writing of Mary Baker Eddy Patterson Glover Fry...Annie Besant, Madam Blavatsky, Judge Rutherford, Joseph Smith, nobody. Not the word of any man today who declares he gets revelation from God, no one, no word outside Scripture is authoritative in the realm of the soul. And God has demanded that His Word be heard and believed and obeyed and that is the task of the preacher to bring that word to the people so they can hear it, believe it and obey it. And the Word of God very clearly says if you don't do that there are fatal damning consequences. And for the Christian who doesn't obey, severe chastening. Frankly I believe that to deny that Scripture is the only authority is a form of blasphemy.

There's a third mistaken area of supposed authority, we'll call it rational power...rational power. Now I'm for reason, it's nice to meet people who have it. And reason is needed and reason is adequate in some realms of life, but listen carefully, man has exalted reason, of course, ever since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and all of that. But let me tell you something, reason as good as it is, as wonderful as it is in figuring things out in the material world, reason makes no contribution to relating to God. Did you hear that? Reason makes no contribution to relating to God. And that is man's most desperate need. That is the issue that has to be resolved if man is going to escape eternal judgment and if he's going to fulfill the potential for his creation. Listen, reason can do a lot of things but it can't know God. The natural man understandeth not the things of God, neither can he

know them.

God is not known through reason. We can know that He exists, Romans 1, but we cannot know Him. Reason can't know God. Reason is limited, fallen, selfish, protected, ego-centered, self-justifying, sinful. And listen, reason only deals with ideas. Reason only deals with concepts. Reason doesn't deal with relationship. And God is a living being who must be known and loved and served and worshiped and not just conceived of. But reason can only conceive, it can't know. My reason can't get me to God, I can know there is a God but I cannot know God.

And yet there are so many today who imagine they have some great authority in their rational mind, in their great wisdom, in their practical common sense, in their insights into human life, in their psychologizing and philosophizing and they imagine some great power to change people's lives. And maybe they can modify their behavior through psychological technique and human wisdom and great insight, but they cannot relate people to God because God is only known through His...what?...His Word. And all the human insights no matter how clever they might be may conceive God but God is only known for who He is through the revelation of Himself in His Word. Furthermore, reason can't eliminate sin and sin will always be the barrier in knowing God.

And there's a fourth and last note, mistaken areas of authority are also found through what we could call experiential power. It always drives me a little bit nuts when I hear somebody say, "I know it's true because I feel it is." That is a statement of asininity like few that you hear. Nothing is true because you feel it is. I heard a guy on the television the other day say, somebody was talking about statistics, he said, "Well more than that it's true because I feel it's true."

Feeling isn't knowing. I might feel something towards someone I don't know at all. It might be attraction, it might be hatred, animosity. There is no authority in experience. I can have all kinds of experiences which have to be basically explained by my fallen reason. I'm not here to tell you my experiences. I'm not here to tell you the things in my life that have happened that show me all I need to know about God so you can know Him too. I'm not here to give you my rational comprehension, my human wisdom though I might have collected some pretty formidable stuff.

I'm not here to tell you that anything our church says is authoritative and I'm not here to tell you I've got some personal power beyond the pages of Scripture. All those are false concepts of authority. The church has no authority in and of itself as an organization. I have no power in an of myself, I'm a human being just like you are. I don't have anymore supernatural power than you do by the indwelling Holy Spirit. And I can't do what the Apostles and Jesus did. And there is no authority in my reason and there's no authority in my experience. The only authority I have is the Word of God and when I speak I speak the Word of God.

God's authority, by the way, at its noblest is spiritual authority. He does have a temporal authority but He runs His temporal authority through sheer raw power. He created with raw power. He upholds the universe with raw power and coercion and He just makes things happen. But in the area of spiritual authority, He operates not by coercion and raw power but by our acceptance and obedience and response to His commands in Scripture. And that's why I say that's the noblest expression of His authority.

So what then is the role of the preacher? What is Paul saying to Titus? He's saying, "Titus, you then must preach the authority that God has given you through the truth. What else is there?" J.I. Packer writing in a volume called "The Preachers and Preaching," in the opening introduction to that volume wrote this, "The Bible is the real preacher. And all the role of the man in the pulpit or the counseling conversation is is simply to let the passages say their piece through him." Did you get that? "For the preacher to reach the point where he no longer hinders or obstructs his text from speaking is harder work than is sometimes realized. However, there can be no disputing that this is the task." He says, "Anything other than that is not the substance but only the shadow of the real thing," end quote.

What is the preacher's task? Get out of the way so the Word can speak. That's it. Let the Word speak. Preaching is giving a voice to God so that He can command you. And only as the preacher is under the Word can he command anything. And only as he is out of the way does the command come with divine force rather than human personality.

Now listen carefully. This kind of preaching not only brings God's authority but it brings God's presence and His power. Look at 1 Corinthians 14 and I'll give you an illustration of this. There could be many but I'll give you this one. First Corinthians 14 verse 23, verse 22 he says how important prophecy or preaching is, proclaiming. It's very important. He says, "If everybody speaks in tongues, unbelievers will come in and think you're mad." But look at verse 24, "But if you're preaching," and the assumption here in the preaching is that you're preaching the Word of God, I mean, that's the given. "If you're preaching the truth of God and an unbeliever, an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he's called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, he'll fall on his face and worship God and declare God is certainly among you."

You know what happens? Where the Word of God is preached, God is present. Where God is present, God is powerful. Where God is powerful, lives are changed. There's the formula. How difficult is that? People say preaching the Bible is irrelevant. I don't think that's what that text is saying. If they're all preaching, not only is the authority of God there, the presence of God is there and with His presence comes His power and with His power comes transformation. Anything less than getting out of the way so that you don't hinder or obstruct the Word and letting the Word be proclaimed, anything less than that in the name of preaching is a hindrance, it is an obstruction. Furthermore it's an attack on God. It really is. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:4, "My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power

that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God."

Beloved, what people must hear is the authority of God. They must be commanded to believe, commanded to obey. The only preaching God desires is authoritative. The only preaching He desires is commanding. And this only occurs when the Bible speaks directly to the souls of men and when the preacher gets out of the way and lets the Word speak.

There's so little of that today. Somebody will say, "Well what's the problem?" It's easy to answer. I can give you the answer in one word...the problem is...two words...the preacher. He's the problem. We have to get ourselves out of the way so the Word can speak. That is the great challenge. My idea is not to take all my skills and all my giftedness and go to a passage and figure out a clever message. My idea is to go to a passage and dig into that passage as long as I need to dig into that passage until I find out what God's message is. And then get myself out of the way and let the Word of God speak. That's preaching with authority. The biggest hindrance is the preacher. We have to get ourselves and our cleverness out of the way.

J.I. Packer also writing in the Ashland Theological Journal in a little article called "From the Scriptures to the Sermon," said this, "Self projection undermines and erodes authority. If by his words and manner the preacher focuses attention on himself, thus modeling some mode of self-absorption or self- satisfaction rather than humble response to the Word that he proclaims he precludes all possibility of his channeling any sense of divine authority. What he does not feel himself he cannot mediate to others." James Denny said somewhere that, "You cannot convey the impression both that you are a great preacher and that Jesus Christ is a great Savior." He might have added, "Or that the Lord is a great God." God-projection and Christ-projection rather than self-projection is the way to communicate and engender in one's hearers a sense of divine authority in one's preaching. "Self-reliance," he says, "in the act of preaching is a further hindrance to the true authority and preaching, not just self-projection. It has too the effect of inducing the hearers to attend to the messenger rather than the message."

In other words, to man rather than to God and authentic authority is eliminated when that happens. Either self- projection or self-reliance blocks God from speaking authoritatively.

Well as essential as this is to the salvation of the lost, as essential as it is to the church's purity and power, this kind of preaching is rare. Such commanding, frankly, is not what people want to hear. And I think it's partly rare because men aren't trained to do it, they don't understand it and it's partly rare because people don't like it. And I think the church has caught the anti-authority mood of the time, don't you? I really do. I mean, if there's anything our culture hates it's an authority. Nobody wants anybody telling them to do anything. We like preaching in the church that sort of as we've picked up on that so we like preaching that is entertaining and maybe interesting and sometimes sensational and preaching that is tolerant and ego-building, preaching that is popular. But don't give

us strong authoritative commanding demanding pulpits that bring the Word to bear heavily on the heart. We don't like that.

Now I tried to think of some reasons why. Why is it so unpopular today to preach authoritatively? Why don't people want to hear that? Let me give you some reasons that I thought of.

Number one, poor preaching...or as one writer called it, non-preaching. It's so common. Many have never heard the real thing. And so when they hear it it's shocking. And when their mind and their conscience is struck and convicted with the blows of biblical authority, it seems unkind and merciless and strange and foreign. I mean, people expect to be briefly interested and maybe psychologically boosted. But anything harsh or judgmental seems insensitive and out of touch and oblique and like something in left field...who is this guy and where did he come from?

There's a second...a second reason and that would be low expectations. I think people have heard poor preaching for so long they expect it to be poor and they don't recognize it when it's not. The typical comment if someone sat under some really great preaching would be, "I'm not sure I understood that, it was really over my head."

A third reason, spontaneity. I think people for so many years have heard spontaneous preaching which is the kind you make up as you go that they don't have an appetite for well-prepared, profound, challenging, rich, insightful, provocative, deep thinking.

Furthermore, they don't have any theological frame of reference to put anything in. So if you gave them a message on doctrine, they wouldn't know where it went. They wouldn't know where to stick it. It doesn't fit in their psychological categories. The bland amorphous character of most people's doctrinal frame of reference doesn't allow anything definitive...it just...it just doesn't know where to go. It seems isolated and irrelevant.

A fourth reason that people in the church even don't like authoritative preaching is they get comfortable with the liturgy. The preaching is a minor component and they get into the structure whether it's a high church or a low church liturgy, every church has a certain format and people can flow through the format and it's kind of an easy deal and they hear a little message somewhere along the line, kind of fits in. But if you blow the format and the liturgy away with a very powerful biblical message, it seems like it's out of sync with things and it's unnatural with them.

But mostly I think the reason people reject authoritative preaching is the church has caught the spirit of the age. The church wants tolerance and unity and acceptance and not too much definitive and nothing divisive. And commanding people can be very divisive because you either send them out the door saying "I will obey," or "I won't," and you've split the congregation dead down the middle between the will and the won't.

Commanding people to hear and understand, commanding people to believe, commanding people to obey is not popular in the church today because I think it's caught the attitude of the world. And our whole society is anti-authority. And I want to say something about this cause I think you need to understand this. The whole culture rejects authority. I mean, just look at it...just look at what's happening around you in our society. I mean, we're on the verge all the time of anarchy. People demanding and demanding and they don't care who the authority is, they resist it...whether it's the schools or the police, the government, the church, whatever it is.

And why is that? Let me give you some reasons and I think you'll understand these. We live in a time of rejection of authority. Why? Why do we have such an anti-authority mentality? Why does everyone want to do whatever is right in his own eyes? Why does no one want anybody telling him what to do?

Reason number one, that's the nature of sin. That is the nature of sin. Sin is rebellion. It is very natural for man to rebel, it is natural for him to hate every authority, including the authority of God Himself. That's where sin started. It was Satan who rebelled against the authority of God in heaven, it was Eve and Adam who rebelled against the authority of God on earth. And humanity has been rebelling ever since, read Romans 1, that's what that's all about. It's all about rebellion, sin is lawlessness. It is rebellion. There is no respect in the human heart for God's holiness. There's no respect for His law. And there's no respect for His sovereignty.

Secondly.....so what we've got basically is a whole world full of rebels. And all the society has to do is pour a little gas on their rebellious fire and they're going to have a conflagration and that's what we're having.

Secondly, the lack of moral absolutes. How can we exercise authority when we don't know what the rules are? You see, we've rejected the Bible. So what is the standard of authority? If I'm going to say I command you to do this...somebody is going to say...on the basis of what? What rules? What law? What authority? We don't have a standard anymore so how can we be authoritative? How can we command when we don't have any authority, we just have opinions, viewpoints? If we want to know what's right or wrong, we'll take a vote. Either a vote of the populous of America, a vote of the Congress or the Senate, or a vote of the Supreme Court. How can there be any authority when there is no agreed upon standard?

And our society, the only authorities that are recognized today as authorities in the area of the soul of man are the psychologists and the psychiatrists, they're the new authorities and they don't have an opinion on anything. They have no rules. They make no moral judgments. They engage in self-help assistance.

A third contributor to the anti-authority mindset in our society is the failure of parents to discipline their children. We have an entire generation of young people who have grown up with no sense of what it means to respond to authority. And because both parents are working outside the home, when they are in the home they want to minimize conflict so they just give in to the kid. They give in to him all the time and so he never learns authority. Then you have the breakup of the household, the divorces, the immorality, the sexual deviation, the failure, of course, of the children to respect parents who live like that, the failure of the parents to teach respect for authority to their children, a generation of youth growing up who are angry, who are hostile, who are vitriolic, who want their own way, who are going to get their own way no matter what. And that's starting to tell in our society.

There's a fourth contributor, the media. The media has a campaign to destroy all authority whether it's the authority of government, whether it's the authority of the police, whatever authority, all authority is continually suspect, all authority is accused and abused, dragged through the mud. We have seen that in our own city with those in authority and the police and so forth. You see it in the movies and the films, they exalt personal vengeance, they exalt the Rambo mentality, the Dirty Harry, go ahead, make my day, I'll blow your brains out. The ability to go around the law, take personal vengeance, you're the real hero if you do that. Injustice supposedly is claimed everywhere and that gives a right to anybody to do whatever they want. The criminals are all victims. They're all victims because they were abused somewhere along the line and people aren't treating them the way they deserve to be treated, etc., etc.

I was listening to Chief Gates the other day on a radio program and he had some guy on there who was the editor of a very leftist newspaper in Los Angeles called "The Sentinel." And Chief Gates said to him, "Why do the riots in south Los Angeles occur? What caused those riots?" And he said, "Injustice, oppression against those people down there." He said, "The failure of the courts to render a proper justice on their behalf, the whole system is breaking down and they're reacting." And he said, "That's why it happened. It happened because people are tired of injustice and oppression and so forth." And his response was to him was that he didn't believe that at all. In fact he said, "Let me ask you another question then, why were 700 people arrested, two people killed and multi-million dollars worth of damage done in Chicago when the Bulls won a basketball game?" There's no answer to that. The reason people act like that is because they have been taught to break the rules and the laws and grab whatever you can grab. And when there's any reason at all to make war against authority, you make war. It's young people. It's a generation of young people who have been raised by an anti-authority media.

A fifth reason for this anti-authority mentality is the failure of leaders to be models of virtue. You might be able to say, "Well at least you can see a good and a noble man whose life is filled with character and virtue and he can be some kind of a moral standard, but where do you find that kind of a person?" Whether it's the President and the Congress and the senators and the governors and the

mayors and the local leaders in all the areas of leadership including even in the police department, and whether it's school teachers, or whether it's pastors in a church, aren't we all exposed to the unbelievable moral scandals that are behind all these people in leadership?

And then sixthly, and this is the last one I'll give you, and I want to say some things about it. I believe another contributor and a MAJOR contributor to all our thinking is an over estimation of personal rights...an over estimation of personal rights. Humanism, our society frankly is engulfed in a sea of personal freedoms. We've gone crazy with equal rights, personal rights, human rights. Everybody's got rights. Everybody's got equal rights. Our Constitution says that God created all men equal. Wrong. He did not. They may have equal humanity, that is they're all equally human, but they're not all equal. They aren't equal intellectually. They're aren't equal skillfully. They aren't equal physically. They aren't equal environmentally. They aren't equal economically. They aren't equal socially. They're all different. Not to say whether better or not, they're not equal.

But humanism out of the Renaissance said they're equal. They're not equal. Some are going to heaven, some are going to hell. Some belong to God, some don't. Some are children of God, some are children of the devil. Some were designed by God to be leaders, some were designed by God to be followers. Some were designed by God to be among the rich. Some were designed by God to be among the poor. It is God Himself, the sovereign of the universe who determines what a man may be and God's plan was not for equality of all men. They're not equal. I don't mean that they should be deprived of any human rights, they should be given whatever is right and good as the Bible outlines and is very clear about that, but to blanket statement say that all men are created equal is not right.

Up until the Renaissance when we had the birth of humanism, the Bible was considered by the whole western world as the authority and the Word of God and law was made according to Scripture. Then came the Enlightenment, then came the Renaissance, then came rationalism and changed all of that. And it was a sad day. And we in America are a product of the Renaissance, of humanism, of rationalism, of the Enlightenment.

You say, "Well now wait a minute. But we had so many years when we stayed fairly religious." Yes, you know why? Because we came out of that Renaissance period, our forefathers out of Europe and so forth, we came out of that Renaissance period but America was founded by people who founded this country to hold on to...what?...Reformation faith. You had the Renaissance and the Reformation at the same time. Western society went the way of the Renaissance, but some parts of western society held on to the Reformation. And as long as Reformation faith lingered, it controlled Renaissance freedom. You understand that? As long as Reformation faith lingered it controlled Renaissance freedom. You have seen in your life time in the last few years the death of Reformation faith...the death of the Bible as any authority. And now what you're going to have is Renaissance freedom that will run amuck, the same kind of freedom that led to the French Revolution where they said "we're not letting anybody tell us what to do." And started the massacre.

Now what happens in the Renaissance is freedom is the issue. Freedom means independence and freedom means equality to humanists. It means we're all equal. That goes two ways. The Communist way comes out of Rousseau and goes through Marx and Lenin, the Communist way says "Oh, we're all equal, that means we should all have the same thing." That's Communism. So you take the big pie and you cut it into equal slices and give everybody the same. We're all equal so we should all be treated exactly the same way, we all get the same things, we all live in the same kind of little places, we all get the same amount of pay, we all get the same basic privileges, that's Communism, we share everything equally because we're all equal.

Capitalism went the other way, toward democracy. And what democracy said basically was we're all equal, that doesn't mean we all should get the same things, what it means is we should all have the same choices. We should all have our own choice. That leads to democracy where everybody gets an equal vote.

Both of those streams came out of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. What contained the democratic side of it, what contained that in America say or Canada or even in England, what contained that was that there was with it a Reformation faith so that there was still a standard. And we could say yes we make choices, but there's a law that governs those choices. But now we've watched the death of the Reformation faith, all we've got left is Renaissance freedom. And that just means if I want to take all my clothes off, get in a homosexual parade and do it on national television, I'll do whatever I want to do and you won't tell me not to do it because I can do whatever I want, I have equal rights to your equal rights and the only morality is equal rights, and the only immorality is you depriving me of my equal right. That's humanism at its ultimate. That's a Renaissance freedom without a Reformation faith.

And the Bible may be a nice old interesting book with beautiful prose and poetry and some historical records about the Jews and a few ethical teachings but don't tell me it has authority. Nothing has authority over me, I have authority over me and nobody else. Even the word "authority" isn't popular, it represents institutions to people. It sounds like structure. It sounds like laws. It sounds like morals. It sounds like power and it sounds like limits, restraints, control. It even sounds a little like fear and punishment. People don't want that, they want freedom, autonomy, self-determination.

So the Renaissance led to a proud feeling of man's self- sufficiency and his independence from everything and everyone, even God. And the western world got shaped by the Renaissance and once we abandoned what was left of the Reformation, we have seen the results.

The seeds were sown even at the time of Martin Luther. Martin Luther recognized this. He said this, "The universities are places for the training of youth in the fashions of Greek culture where loose living is practiced, where little is taught of the Holy Scriptures and the Christian faith." That's back in

the day of Martin Luther.

The tradition of the Renaissance with man at the center of all rather than God, reason king, the goal was complete and unquestioned freedom, independence and that assaulted scriptural authority. The self creates its own world, said Rousseau, Marx, Lenin. Total breakdown of authority in modern life then stems from this kind of humanism. Everyone has a right to the same thing, said the Communist. Everyone has a right to their own opinion said the Capitalists. And both of them made man the authority.

Listen, beloved, the secret to man's existence, potential, ability and destiny doesn't lie with man, it lies with God. Every time I hear some pea-brained guy "you can be anything you want to be," I'm again shocked by the idiocy of man. You can be nothing that God doesn't want you to be. God is the sovereign. And God has set the laws for man's behavior. You violate them and you'll pay the consequences. Whatever man does is not to be determined by man but by God. So if men are going to live under the authority of God, then who is going to dispense the authority of God to them? That's the preacher's role...that's what we're all about. We have to speak to this culture. They may not like it but that doesn't change the mandate, does it? That doesn't alter what we do. That only makes it more necessary. So we are always crying, "Where are the men who are preaching the Word? Where are the preachers that you can't remember their personality that much and you sure can't remember the outline but you have this heavy load of shame in your life because you heard him preach? Or you have this sense of joy because you heard them promise you the blessings of God if you would obey?" I mean, you walked away and you felt like you had an encounter with God and His Word, not that you watched an actor.

We're called to preach an authoritative Word. We're called to command people to hear, believe and obey. Speak, he says in verse 15, and then exhort. What does that mean? Drive it into their life with urgency so that they grab it and hold to it and it becomes conviction. And reproof, what does that mean? Speak against disobedience so that you compel them to obey it. And do that with all the authority you have because it's the voice of God through His revealed Word, and don't let anybody try to circumvent that process. That's our task...the preacher's authority.

William Barclay wrote this, "The eyes of the sinner must be open to his sin. The mind of the misguided must be led to realize its mistake. The heart of the heedless must be stabbed broad awake. The Christian message is no opiate to send men to sleep, it is no comfortable assurance that everything will be all right. It is rather the blinding light which shows men themselves as they are and God as He is," end quote.

Preaching has authority when both its substance and its style proclaim in a transparent way the preacher's own docile humility before the Bible itself and before the triune God whose Word the Bible is. It is as the preacher himself is truly under and is clearly seen to be under the authority of God and

the Bible that he will have authority and be felt to carry authority as God's spokesman. It is those under authority who have authority. It is those whose demeanor models submission to the Scriptures and dependence on the Lord of the Word who mediate the experience of God's authority in their preaching. And certainly that is a high sacred calling. It leads me to say...pray for the preacher.

Father, we thank You for our time this morning. We've taken a little extra time but felt that this message was so important and just pray, Lord, that You'll accomplish with it Your good will, in Christ's name. Amen.

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