The Responsibilities of the Church: Exercising Authority, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-146

As we return to our study of the subject of authority tonight, I want to draw you back to Matthew Chapter 23 with just a very brief review for a few moments. We are in a series on the anatomy of the church. We are talking about the characteristics of the church. We took the biblical metaphor of the church as a body. The Scriptures identify that the church is like a human body in that it has a head, which is Christ and a body, which is a fully functioning membership of the living church of Christ, through which his life pulses and we have extended that metaphor and sort of broken it down a little bit and we've discussed the anatomy of the church. First of all we looked at the skeleton, the foundational doctrines that set the frame for the church. Then we talked about the spiritual attitudes; those would be the internal systems of the body that carry its life. And now we are talking about the muscles or the functions of the church. We've talked about fellowship, we've talked about preaching and teaching and now we have come to discuss the very important issue of the church functioning as the authority in the world. We are the authority because we speak the word of God.

It is the function of the church to speak the truth to the world, both to the unregenerate and to those that are within the family of God. The church should be the bastion of truth, should be the place of proclamation of God's divine revelation.

And so we started this morning in Titus Chapter 2, where we were told that Paul said to Titus, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." We looked then at the person of Jesus Christ who spoke as one having authority and that was the most notable thing about Jesus' preaching as he unfolded the gospel, as he unfolded the message of repentance and the kingdom to the Jews around him was that they were struck by his authority. And, of course, they began to question his authority and there was a total collision of the reigning Jewish authority with the authority of Jesus Christ that ended up in his being executed.

And that's the conflict that we find identified in Matthew Chapter 23. Let's just pick it up there. As I said this morning, the Lord essentially was crucified over an authority issue. Certainly from the standpoint of God he had it planned and predetermined that Christ would go to the cross as a substitute for sinners and that was all unfolding according to his will, but the actual confrontation that produced the hostility that brought about the Jews demanding the death of Jesus at the hands of the Romans was a hostility born of the conflict over authority. They, that is the Pharisees and scribes and High Priest and all the rest of them, were resisting authority in Israel. They were the ones who set the religious agenda, they were the ones who interpreted the Scripture, the Law of Moses, they

were the ones who bound upon the people whatever duties and responsibilities religiously and morally were to be theirs. They saw themselves as the true and pure interpreters of divine truth and responsible for it in the lives of the people, and yet Jesus came and confronted them, called they hypocrites, blind leaders of the blind, questioned any right that they might have as authorities because they didn't know God and basically dismantled their authority.

He did it in a public way, as we noted this morning, starting on Wednesday of Passion Week when he went into the temple during Passover and confronted the population that was gathered there, a massive population, not only of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but all over the Jewish world as they had made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover, and there it was in front of the great crowds facing the elders, the Chief Priest, he questioned their authority and, of course, tore into it in powerful, powerful ways.

I remind you that we noted for you that in that very moment on the temple ground on the Wednesday of Passion Week he told three parables, which were judgment parables on the Jewish leaders followed by a series of three questions and answers, which even deepened their hostility toward him because they indicted them even more greatly. It's in that context that we come to Matthew Chapter 23, the collision between the authority of Jesus and the authority of Jewish leaders.

And in Matthew Chapter 23, Jesus attacks the Jewish leaders in no uncertain terms and frankly leaves no stone unturned. And what he tells them basically is they have no real authority. He confronts their authority. And essentially in the 23rd Chapter of Matthew he points out false authority.

First of all, and I want to give you several points and we'll run by them rather rapidly. He says they had no authority because they lacked authenticity, they lacked authenticity. Then it says in verse 1, "Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples saying, 'The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.'" Now Moses' seat, or the chair of Moses was sort of an official name for the position or office of authority in a synagogue. You remember there was one temple in Jerusalem, but there were many synagogues, many gathering places in every town and village where there were a dozen Jewish males they could start a synagogue and in that synagogue some would sit in authority. They would be sitting, as it were, in the seat of Moses, that is, they would be representatives of the Mosaic Law and the Mosaic ceremony, the Cathedra of Moses. That would be like the Chair of Philosophy in a university.

Now notice what it says. It says they seated themselves there. And it's pointing out, I think, that no one really gave them the authority. No one gave them the right. They sort of took it on their own. Jesus refers to this in John 10:1,2, when he calls them, "Thieves and robbers who are not true shepards who do not belong in the sheepfold, but who climb over the wall to come in and take advantage of the sheep." They seated themselves there, reminds me of the book of Jeremiah.

In going through the book of Jeremiah hour upon hour as I was preparing the study notes on the book of Jeremiah, I continued, as I go through the book, Chapter 14, 23, Chapter 27, and elsewhere to run into false teachers who usurp authority that is never given to them by God. This is true of those with false authority. They have taken it on themselves. They had no real authority, they were not authentic, they were usurpers. They were not called of God but rather put them selves in that place. So Jesus, in a sense, says to them you have no authority because you have no authenticity. You have taken a seat that doesn't belong to you.

Secondly they lacked simplicity, they lacked simplicity. Verses 3 and 4, this is quite interesting, as I pointed out this morning because Jesus says to them, "Therefore all that they tell you do and observe." In other words, as long as they speak the Law of Moses, do it. As long as they speak the ceremonial law and the moral law of Moses, as long as they tell you how to feel toward God and how to think toward God and how to act toward God and how to carry out the sacrifices and the festivals and feasts and duties and responsibilities that are incumbent upon us from Mosaic Law, do it, because even in the mouth of a false prophet, the truth is still the truth. But, he says, "Do not do according to their deeds for they say things and do not do them, they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy loads and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger."

They sat in Moses' seat, a place where the law of God was to be taught, and when it was taught, and when it was properly represented the people were to do it because it was the truth of God. But that is the only thing that is binding, just the word of God. Man shall live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. As long as they were speaking that what they said was true and to be obeyed.

But the religious leaders of Israel left that simplicity and the ministry has a simplicity in that it is confined to the word of God. All authority is confined to the word of God. The religious leaders of Israel went way beyond that. They generated a multiplicity of diversions. A multiplicity of laws and rules and regulations and ceremonies and rituals and forms and traditions that far exceeded the law of God. It says in verse, 4 "They tie up heavy loads and lay them on men's shoulders."

Through the years since the rediscovering of the law of God, the reaffirmation of the law of God in Nehemiah Chapter 8, during the intervening years it had become the most noble profession in Judaism to study the law and to teach the law. It became the center of mounting material as they kept accumulating and accumulating and accumulating their clarifications and their enhancements and their embellishments and, in fact, eventually from the simplicity of the Old Testament 39 books, there came to be, are you ready for this, 50 volumes of regulations that had accumulated in rabbinical teaching. All of that accumulated extra-biblical stuff trying to create comprehensive behaviors that could somehow bring a person to the knowledge of God and to eternal salvation and they went way beyond Scripture. In the process they began to be more concerned about the traditions of men than

they were about the law of God. They literally obscured the law of God.

Jesus says should they speak the law of God, do it. But the fact of the matter is for every time that they may have spoken the law of God there would be many more times when they would dump this massive load on people's back, this complexity that paralyzed people. I think it was in the context of that complexity that the question came up; the question asked earlier in the debate with Jesus about how can one ever hope to keep the law? To which Jesus replied in this marvelous summary, "If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself you've kept the law." In other words the divine law is merely an expansion and expression of those two great realities. But they had taken Scriptural simplicity and turned it into confusing complexity, and consequently they lost their authority. And again I say authority comes when you speak the word of God.

Thirdly they lacked integrity, because it says in verse 3, what they tell you from the law of Moses, do and observe, but do not according to their deeds for they say things and do not do them. Now that simply is a lack of integrity. They say things and they don't do them. They talk but they don't live. They have no internal restraint. They are masking vice with their superficiality. Their hypocrisy on the outside is covering up wretchedness on the inside.

Verse 25 of this chapter. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence." Verse 27, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." Verse 28, "Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." And down in verse 33, "You serpents, you brood of snakes, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?" Very indicting comments about their hypocrisy. They lacked integrity. Integrity simply means you live what you say. You see they had no authority because they lacked authenticity, they lacked simplicity, they lacked integrity.

Fourthly they lacked sympathy. Verse 4, "They tie up heavy loads, lay them on men's shoulders; they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger." The picture here is of a man loading an unbearable burden on a slave. They're great at commanding, they're great at demanding, intimidating, heaping rules, regulations and guilt trips on everybody and they won't do so much as to lift a finger to assist someone to carry the unbelievable load, all the while obscuring grace, all the while obscuring mercy, obscuring the forgiveness of God.

There are many people in ministry who think that authority means piling rules on people, piling legalistic behaviors on people, and that's how you exercise authority. Well these people had no love, no compassion, no mercy, no tenderness, no pity, no caring. In Mark 12:40 it says, "They devoured widows' houses." They made life absolutely unbearable even for those who were most destitute.

They were the very opposite of Jesus who said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is what, is light." Authority is not a club that crushes people. It is not right to pile up unbearable burdens. It's just the opposite. It's showing them the word of God reminding them that they can cast all their cares on the one who cares for them.

Fifthly they lacked spirituality. Verse 5, "They do all their deeds to be noticed by men." Everything was for show. It was all on the outside. "They broadened their phylacteries." Those were little boxes with the shama, the Lord our God is one, from Deuteronomy 6, and they wore them on their heads and on their arms and "they lengthened the tassels of their garments." Those were the things that identified a Jew and so they were putting on the show. They were outwardly trying to appear super spiritual by extreme measures to make themselves look righteous, when in fact it was all for show. They do it all to be noticed by men. Bottom line, they were like Jude 19, sensual, not having the Spirit. They lacked real spirituality.

And then number 6, they lacked humility. Verse 6 says, "They loved the place of honor at banquets, the chief seats in the synagogues, and they liked those respectful greetings in the market place and being called by men Rabbi." They were pompous, they were vain, they were proud, they sought the seats of honor near the host, they wanted to be on the raised platform in front facing the people, they loved formal titles, they wanted to be called Rabbi, great one, supreme one, superior one, the Jewish term for teacher, equivalent to dacarae, the Latin term for doctor, they wanted to be called master, guide, instructor. They wanted to be called Father. Well notice that it says in verse 8, "Do not be called Rabbi for One is your Teacher and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your Father, for one is your Father, he who is in heaven." They wanted to be called Rabbi, teacher, master, Father. Father would be source of life. That term is inherent in the Roman Catholic words Father, Abbot, and Pope. There is a title in the Anglican Church in England the Right Reverend Father in God.

Well the Jews loved those kind of titles and Jesus says to them, you have no humility, no sympathy, no simplicity, no spirituality, no integrity, no authenticity and therefore you have no authority. Bottom line! No authority.

Verses 11 and 12, very important. It says after telling the disciples, "Don't be called Rabbi for One is your Teacher, don't be called father for One is your Father, don't be called leader One is your Leader that is Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant." Take that title. That's why they call us ministers because minister is just a word for servant. "And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." Just call yourself minister. Just call yourself servant. That's enough.

There's a lot of false authority out there. It was true in Jesus time and it's still true. And Jesus collided with it and confronted it head on. And as I said to you this morning, it is absolutely essential

that the church speak authoritatively. It is essential that we command. Even the gospel is a command. Repent and believe is a command, not a suggestion. And if you disobey it, it has eternal implications.

When we preach the word of God to you as believers we preach it in a commanding mode demanding compliance, demanding that you hear and understand, that you believe and that you make it a part of your convictions and that you submit to is and put it into practice in obedience. Authority is absolutely essential, but we live in a time when authority is prostituted just like it was in Jesus' day. There are lots of false authorities. And I want to address some of that bouncing off of this passage a little bit.

Let me suggest some of those false authorities that we face today in the church. Jesus faced them and there they were and I gave you a brief outline of that if you want a deeper treatment of that you can get my commentary on Matthew or the tapes and you can hear the full exposition of that passage all the way to the end of the chapter. It's so dramatic. But let's turn the corner a little bit. Understanding that Jesus confronted the current authorities of his time, never backed up, and it caused the execution that occurred on the cross. In other words they killed him because he questioned their authority and threatened it.

Always when you bring the authority of the word of God to bear upon those who reject it, it's going to create conflict, whether it's the unbelieving society in which you live, or whether it's the disobedient believers or those who aren't willing to come under sound doctrine in the church. But there are today some mistaken authorities and I think they fall into four categories. That's what I'll suggest to you.

Number one would be personal authority, personal authority. There are people who think that they have power in themselves. In fact there's some who think they have the same power and authority that Jesus and the Apostles had. There are some who think that they have the personal power, for example, to cast out demons, that they have the personal power to heal the sick, that they might even have the personal power to raise the dead. And sometimes you see them on television claiming to have the power of God to knock people down. Some of these people go around commanding Satan, telling Satan to do this and do that and go here and stay there and tie himself up and get out of town and they command demons, they take authority over disease and death, they even have the audacity to command holy angels and even God himself. They command where they have no authority, where they have no jurisdiction whatsoever.

Jesus had that authority. He commissioned the apostles according the Matthew Chapter 10; he gave them the authority to heal and to cast out demons, but that authority was limited to the person of Jesus Christ and to the apostles. There are people today who want to normalize that as if it went on all the time. If you want to check redemptive history you'll find an interesting thing. Go into the Old Testament, start in Genesis, read all the way through to Malachi and find a place where a believer

commanded Satan. There were believers in the Old Testament too, right? Find a place where believers had authority over demons. Find a place where believers had the power to heal the sick as a general pattern of ministry or raise the dead. You won't find it. Those kinds of miracles are extremely rare in the Old Testament, just not a part of the life of believers then and nor is it a part of the life of believers now, but it was in one explosive moment in history, like no other moment when the Messiah came and the new covenant was being written. That demanded an explosion of confirming signs unique to that period. Never before, never since!

There are some who believe they have personal authority to forgive sin. Some take authority over sin. Some who are priests in the Roman Catholic Church imagine that they, by virtue of their office, and a person's penitence or pentence can thereby grant forgiveness, but the Bible says the Son of Man has authority to forgive sin. This kind of personal authority, this illusion comes from misunderstanding of Scripture, wishful thinking, pride, and self-confidence. It's false, it's foolish, and it's a proud illusion, it's non-existent.

There's another area of mistaken authority that is prevalent today and that is church authority. That's the authority not so much residing in a person, but residing in a denomination or a system. Many judge the church to be the authority in spiritual matters and by that I mean the church as the church, not the church as the proclaimer of biblical truth, but the church as the church. This too is an illusion, false and destructive and commanding where there is no jurisdiction. What do I mean by this? Well take for example the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church through the centuries has tried to usurp authority over the souls of men and over the souls of nations by virtue of church teaching and church authority, not simply in the Bible, not limited to the Scripture at all. The Roman Catholic Church for centuries has claimed to be the only legitimate, valid, interpreter of Scripture; therefore, no other interpretation but that interpretation rendered by the church itself through its Councils and Papal edicts is a valid interpretation. So that no person needs to interpret the Scripture, the church will do that for them. The church, therefore, is infallible.

The Roman Catholic Church asserts its own infallibility, it is infallible in its interpretation of Scripture, it is infallible, therefore, in its theology and that's why it never changes. In the Roman Catholic system there is what is called the Magisterium. The Magisterium is the body of infallible authoritative teaching that's not in the Bible. It is based on apostolic succession, the idea that the Pope and the Popes that have followed the original Pope, whoever that might be, they want to take it back to Peter, but, of course, it is not. But there is an apostolic succession they think coming through all the Popes that has a continuing Papal infallibility and that Popes are continuing to receive revelation from God. That comes from the Pope. That comes from church Councils and all of that finds its way into creeds, traditions, articles of faith, excathedria pronouncements, Councils, etc. And it makes up this extra biblical magisterium. For example, doctrines like purgatory, that there is some kind of a waiting place

between earth and heaven where people go to have some of the sin sort of burned off and you stay there for a few hundred years and you finally make it to heaven. That's not in the Bible but it's authoritative because it's in the magisterium.

There is the doctrine of the Treasury of Merit. The Treasury of Merit is quite an interesting doctrine in Roman Catholicism. It says that some people have more righteousness than they need and so when they go to heaven some of their righteousness gets thrown in a box 'cause they don't need it all. There's lots of folks like this and they fill up a treasury of merit that can be given at God's discretion to somebody else who really needs it. And usually it's passed out at God's discretion to somebody whose fighting his way through purgatory trying to get out and get into heaven and God, by his own choice, can apply some of the treasury of merit from somebody's excess righteousness to that individual to get him to heaven sooner. That's not in the Bible either. It's in the Magisterium.

Penance, the idea that by paying a certain amount of money, or by going through a certain amount of ritual you can sort of work off your sins, the perpetual virginity of Mary, that is to say that Mary never knew a man in her entire life and never consummated the marriage with Joseph or anybody else and never was the mother of any other children, that, of course, is contrary to Scripture, but that's in there. The idea that Mary was also born of a virgin as Jesus was is also in the Magesterium. The idea that Mary is the co-redemptrix with Christ, the idea that if you want something from Jesus go to Mary because nobody can resist his mother, not even Jesus and Jesus is the tough guy and Mary is easy and she can get to him for what you need while if you just go to him you might not get it. All of that is bound up in the Magisterium. The Roman Catholic Church in its own eyes has become the final authority, has every right to command people to adhere to its self-designed dogmas and commands and through the years is even executed people who didn't comply.

And a simple way to say it the word is under the church. Eastern Orthodox churches are the very same while the Eastern Orthodox is iconoclastic in that it doesn't have images and there was a fight about all of that, it is much the same in its approach. It has authority by its liturgy, it has authority by the teaching and the Councils and the Fathers. Their authority is a contrary authority that resists the Papacy. So the Papacy has one authority, the Orthodox church has another authority. They claim that the authority for their infallible magisterium comes from seven church Councils, the first of those in 325 in Nicia and the last of those in 787 in Nicia and five in-between have constituted the Magisterium of the Orthodox church. They agree with Rome on this: that the church can speak infallibly, the church does speak infallibly, its interpretation of Scripture are infallible, its traditions are infallible, its Articles of Faith are infallible, and they judge Scripture. True Christianity has always said that the church is under the word. But the Orthodox, like the Catholics, say the word is under the church.

This is a false authority. God is the final authority and he has revealed his authoritative word on the pages of Scripture and that's where it begins and that's where it ends, and anyone who adds anything

to it and claims it's the authoritative word of God shall be added to him the plagues that are written in it according to the last few verses of Revelation Chapter 22. The only authority comes through the word of God.

Thirdly, there's another sort of contemporary authority that I want to comment on. I guess we could call it rational authority, rational authority. That is to say that man with the use of his own mind, and, of course, since the time of the enlightenment, the French Revolution, Industrial Revolution, man has had a love affair with his own mind and become enamored with his own capabilities and the more he is enamored with his own mind the more capable he thinks he is to sort out the issues of life. And so, you have a developing rational authority. The idea that we can pretty well figure out things ourselves and we can speak authoritatively about the issues of life, about people's problems, about the solutions to those problems, about what makes people the way they are and the issues of life. And we can even think authoritatively about strategies for the church and for ministry that transcend and go beyond Scripture.

Now we want you to use your mind, folks, we want you to use your mind to understand the word of God and make application of the word of God in your life because when it comes to the spiritual dimension the word of God is all the authority there is. We don't want you to use your mind to come out with something that is competing with the word of God. That has happened a lot. It has happened with the invasion of experiential mystical theology into the church, mysticism. It's happened with the invasion of subjectivism or psychology into the church. It's happened with the invasion of pragmatism into the church. We always have a better idea. And those who just faithfully adhere to the word of God and preach and teach its truths and endeavor to live them are looked on as non-intellectual.

We have to keep in mind, however, that we're dealing with supernatural truth in the Scriptures and anything beyond that is weak, powerless, because it is not supernatural. Human reason, at its best, is limited, fallen, selfish, protective, ego-centered, self-justifying, and sinful.

My son, Mark, said to me one day, we were sitting on the bed and he was just a high school kid and he looked at me and he said, "Dad, I don't understand you." I said, "Really?" He said, "No." He said, "When you preach you're so profound and the rest of the time you're just so plain. What's the deal?" I said, "If I'm ever profound it's because I'm speaking a profound word from God. The rest of the time you're right, it's just me."

And the best of human thoughts can only deal with concepts and can't affect relationships with God. God is a living being who must be known and loved and served and worshipped and not just conceived of and no one can enter the secret place of God's life unless God lets him in on the basis of divine transformation, divine relationship that comes through the word of God. Reason can't get men there, even at its best. Reason can't save, it can't sanctify, it can't glorify. Human reason and

ingenuity doesn't build the church. What builds the church is the word of the living God. That's what builds the church. That's what transforms lives.

Finally, fourthly there is a fourth element of authority that is raining havoc in the church today. I'll call it experiential authority. I alluded to it in the point just given, but it deserves to be discussed on its own. Experiential authority. The idea that there's some authority in your experience. This is frightening to me. Somebody who says the Lord talked to them and told them this or the Lord showed them what this means, or the Lord showed them what to do, or told them to do this, or told them to do that, that is a greatly disturbing thing to say.

The truth of the matter is the only time you know that the Lord has told you something specifically is when you're reading the Scripture. That's true! You might say, "Well I was looking for a church and the Lord led me here." Well that's, we'd like to believe that's true. And you know something, it probably is, but at the time there was no phenomenon occurring that demonstrated that it was the Lord and not the fact that somebody told you that this was a good place to come and you came. In other words, there's no red light on the top of your head that goes on and starts spinning around when it's the Lord. There is no phenomenon. There's no measurable way to say this is the Lord. You're not getting any revelation. You can say that I wanted to be here because this is where the word of God is taught and I wanted to be here because the Lord made the circumstances possible, and as I look back it's obvious that he was directing me.

Listen, I believe the Lord leads, oh yes, and I believe the Lord guides and leads you into all truth and gives direction to your life as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God, right? Romans 8. The Lord leads, but you know most often in retrospect there's no particular feeling distinct from every other feeling, there's no particular phenomena distinct from every other phenomena that says that this is God doing this. You follow the word of God. You be obedient to the Scripture and in your obedience to the Scripture you will walk in the Spirit and God will order your steps. For the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.

This idea that the Lord told me this and the Lord told me that and the Lord moved me over here and told me to go over there and told me to say this to this person and this to that person, be careful that you don't get caught up in that. The only thing that's authoritative is what the Lord said and the apostles and prophets wrote down. That is a false authority, but it is rampant in the church, rampant.

The Bible is the real preacher. The Bible is the real authority and all the role of the man in the pulpit or in the counseling conversation is, is to simply let the passage say its peace. Now the preacher's job is to reach the point where he no longer hinders or obstructs the Scripture. You know the big problem for a preacher? Get him self out of the passage so that it speaks the word of God.

In fact, in much of the study that you do, when you prepare to study the word of God and to interpret the word of God, you find that having read a passage initially something clicks and you say, "Oh, yeah, I understand that. Oh I know what to say about that. I grasp that." And you spend about 10 hours studying it and you come out with a completely different view. And what's happened is you've been through a process of getting your preconceptions out of there. That's part of it. That's a very challenging task. To get to the point where you no longer hinder or obstruct the text from saying what God wanted it to say is harder work than we sometimes realize.

And so, we come with divine authority because we come with the word of God. There's no personal authority. There's no ecclesiastical church authority. There's no rational authority. We're not coming giving you the wisdom of man, and there is no authority in our experiences. I can't say that because this happened and that happened and this happened and that happened that's the normal spiritual principle from God to be applied to everybody. No! The only preaching that God wants is authoritative. The only preaching and teaching and instructing in the church and out of the church that he wants is that which commands and the only place to find authoritative truth to be commanded is in the word of God.

Now I don't want to get over simplistic at this point. I thank God for all of those who preach and help me understand the word of God, all those who write and help me understand the word of God and help me understand its application in the world, but the value is they take me back to the word of God and help me to understand it. That should be the passion of every preacher. I have a pretty simple job. My job is to tell you what the word of God says and to explain it so that you can understand it. That's what I do, whether it's preaching or writing or whatever. That's speaking with authority.

Now this isn't popular today. It is not popular to speak authoritatively. It is not popular to preach convictions. It is not popular to draw clear doctrinal lines on the big front. It's just not popular. And the question has come to me many times why, why is it not popular? Why is there such an anti-authority attitude today? Why is it that people who speak clearly doctrinally are labeled as, well for one label that I've gotten, heresy hunters? They see you as some negative person trying to sort out everybody that doesn't agree with you and so forth. Why is there such resistance to authority? Why is there such an absence of strong authoritative commanding word-centered pulpits that bring the word of God with clarity to bear upon the hearts of men? Why so much entertainment?

Let me give you a few reasons. Number one: poor preaching or non-preaching. Some people haven't heard the real thing and when they do hear it their conscience is struck with the blows of biblical authority and they resist it. You know to put it simply some people have heard poor preaching for so long that good preaching offends them. They've never really had their hearts confronted with the power and the force of biblical authority and it seems strange and foreign and sort of unkind.

Secondly, low expectations. People, frankly, sort of expect to be briefly interested and maybe psychologically bumped a few notches and nothing more. And coming at them with intricate complex treatments of the word of God is just kind of out of touch, really out of touch. They really don't expect anything very profound. They're not really prepared for that, after all it's Sunday and we'd like to get to the brunch as quickly as we can. They just have low expectations. They're not coming prepared; "girding up the loins of their mind," as Peter said, ready to think deeply about great truth.

The third reason why there's an anti-authority attitude is what I call spontaneous preaching. We had this meeting, it was interesting because we had this meeting with all these pastors and so after every time I preached we had open question and answer and these guys would ask me questions and I was very interested at the end that one gentleman stood up and he said this: he said, "I go to conferences like this all the time," and I'm not saying this to commend myself, but simply to point up the issue, he said, "I go to conferences all the time, I've been to many conferences and I just want to thank you for one thing." He said, "You prepared." He said, "I frankly am weary of hearing off the cuff spontaneous messages." And I thought to myself well I don't go to conferences like this unless I'm the preacher so I'm not used to hearing those kinds of things, but that would be, it would be considerably underestimating the opportunity wouldn't it, to have 700 or 800 pastors sitting at your feet for three days and not prepare something to say to them that would carry them deeply into the word of God and have an impact on their life?

You know it's true that people, in churches across America, have no appetite for well-prepared challenging, rich, insightful, provocative preaching because they've heard so much shallow off the cuff stuff. And you know it's kind of like if you gave them a dose of sort of profound theology they wouldn't have a frame of reference to put it in. It would just sort of float in space. It would seem isolated and irrelevant, whereas when you're used to solid sound doctrinal preaching, everything has a place doesn't it, in your mind. It goes in somewhere and it locks into other truth and it begins to build the edifice of a sound understanding of God's word. But you take great theological truth, great biblical truth to people who have not heard that and it just sort of floats in space somewhere.

There's a fourth reason, I think, that people have an anti-authority attitude and that is because people are sort of into structure rather than substance. Liturgy, lots of churches are sort of into a structure that's more important to them than substance.

But fifthly, and this may be the one I'll sort of camp on for a minute, I think there is just a general spirit of the age that makes people sort of anti-authority. I mean we live in an age of absolute intolerance and particularly intolerance of anybody who's in authority. Young people resist the authority of their parents, do they not? Young people resist the authority of police. They resist the authority of educators in universities. They want to run the institutions. They resist even authority, it's amazing when these kids get into the workplace how can they survive if they come in with such a rebellious attitude? Nobody wants anybody telling them what to do. People want tolerance for everything,

noting definitive, nothing demanded. That's just the spirit of the age. There's an intolerance of authority. Our whole society is really sort of anti-authority. I mean we're drowning in a sea of opinions, aren't we? You say why? Why is there in society an anti-authority mentality? Here are some reasons:

Number one it's the nature of sin. If I were to define sin in one word, if you pushed me to the wall and said okay MacArthur you have one word to define sin here's the word: rebellion. Is that not it? That's the one word that defines sin, rebellion. It is the nature of sin to rebel. It was the nature of sin in the case of Lucifer to rebel against divine authority. It was the nature of sin in Eve to rebel against divine authority and Adam to rebel against divine authority and it's always that way. Romans Chapter 1 all of the flow of history has been a constant rejection of God. Romans 1. When they knew God they glorified him not as God, rebellion, rebellion. No respect for God, no respect for his law, no respect for his holiness, no respect for his sovereignty. Sin, in its sort of irreducible minimum is rebellion.

And so it is the nature, then, of sinful people to reject authority and particularly to reject biblical authority. So I like to keep that in your minds because when you confront someone with the gospel, when you confront some Christian with the truth of the word of God resistance to that is a manifestation of fallen ness. It is a sin. There's nothing wrong with the methodology. You're not wrong in confronting them. You're not wrong in presenting the truth. It's not going to do you any good to water the whole deal down so they don't rebel because then you've missed the point. Better to surface the rebellion against the truth so it can be dealt with. So, the reason there's an anti-authority mentality is because that's the nature of fallen beings to resist authority. That's just how it is and you can add into that, as sort of a parenthesis under rebellion, the word pride because it is pride that makes you rebel. You're going to do it your way, right? You your own God, you're going to do your own thing. You're going to have it your way, all those vernacular phrases.

The nature of sin is rebellion. So keep it in mind that whenever you preach truth and you preach it commandingly or you proclaim it or you give testimony or you teach it and you find resistance, that's the nature of sin. You have literally found the nerve.

Secondly, we are in an anti-authority culture because we have a lack of moral absolutes. We have a lack of moral absolutes. We've rejected the Bible. We don't want the Bible in the schools. We don't want the Bible anywhere in our culture. We don't want anybody making the Bible an authority. We don't want any Christians coming along and saying you've got to this you've got to do that. We don't want anybody telling us what to do. There is a serious rejection of the Bible in our time.

When I was in New Zealand this summer I may have mentioned to you earlier, preaching through New Zealand for three weeks, I was asked to preach to the Parliament. The New Zealand Parliament has an incredible looking building called the Beehive and the reason it got that name is because that's

what it looks like. That's where the Parliament meets of New Zealand and they asked me if I would come to the Parliament and speak on the subject, What Happens to a Nation That Turns Its Back on the Scriptures, to the New Zealand Parliament? What a great opportunity. And I have had living experience of that here. And they're going down the same path and they know it and everything that's bad about America is being exported and imported in the New Zealand like it is all over the world. And the Parliament wanted to come to grips with this.

So I had the opportunity to address them. They're concerned about what's going to happen in their country when they no longer have a standard of moral absolutes because the Bible is taken away. How can there be any authority? How can you say anything authoritatively if there's no standard that's recognized? If there's no standard of behavior, if there's no fixed standard of behavior then how can anybody say anything authoritatively? When you say well it says so in the Bible, it doesn't mean anything. When there's no standard for what is true, no standard for what is right, no standard for what is good, no standard for what is noble, then everybody does what is right in his own eyes, right? And that's where we are. So in a place where the nature of sin is rebellion and sin is now free to express itself in any way it wants, and where there is a lack of moral absolutes you will have an anti-authority mentality.

Thirdly, here is another component that contributes to this: the failure of parents to discipline their children. In each society that allows children to grow up undisciplined is breeding anarchy. The breakdown of the home, sexual immorality, divorce, single parents, failure to teach children the meaning and respect for authority has created a generation of youth who basically resort to whatever they want to do and you're not about to be the authority in their life. They resent anyone telling them what to do. And we haven't even begun to see the reaping of this whirlwind. The current generation of children raising themselves on television and MTV and a worsening culture being shoved down their throats through the media is going to have a greater and greater hostility toward authority and any moral absolutes and going to demand a greater and greater expression of their innate rebellious sin nature. That's why things go from bad to worse.

Fourth, there's an anti-authority mentality in our society because of the media destruction of authority in general. The media has gone after every authority, whoever it is, people in leadership, police, community leaders, whoever. Questions the authority of everybody, done everything to break down authority to create distrust, portrayed criminals as victims and the people trying to deal with them as the perpetrators of the real crime.

There was a major riot in the city of Chicago some years ago and terrible things happened. People were even killed and buildings were burned and stores were smashed and things were just disastrous and when they looked at it and said why did it happen it was because the Chicago Bulls won the basketball championship. It was either that or the Bears winning the football championship. I can't remember which and it was a good reminder that while we would like to think that people might be

doing that out of the noble motives of injustice it's just an expression of the fallenness of the human heart and given almost any reason they behave out of control. And when society tries to move in to control that the media begins to attack and it's not always utterly impartial, but begins to find everything wrong it can in the authority and somehow those who perpetrated the crimes are pictured as victims. This is a grievous thing in our society.

Number five: the failure of leaders. We have to admit this. There are leaders who abuse authority. There are leaders who have no integrity, they fail to model virtue, they sin scandalously and all that does is elevate people's distrust in leaders. Doesn't it? What do you expect out of a leader? What do you expect out of a president? What do you expect out of a senator or congressman? What do you expect out of a mayor of a city? What do you expect out of a principal of a school? What do you expect out of a university faculty member? What do you expect out of a policeman? What kind of conduct do you expect? I tell you this: you have a great different expectation than my father had of those people in his life, very different. Why? Whatever there was of sort of nobility, whatever there was of being a model of virtue has long disappeared from leadership. And this just adds to everybody's suspicions, doesn't it?

And then sixthly, and I'll get a little philosophical here if you'll indulge me for a minute. Another thing that contributes to an anti-authority attitude is the overestimation of personal rights. My son Mark gave me a book at Christmas that he thought I'd enjoy reading and I starting reading it. It's called Slouching Toward Gomorrahwritten by Robert Bork. And in the book he points out the fact that the dominant value in American culture is egalitarianism. In other words, the one single moral tenant that we've decided must survive is equal rights for everybody, egalitarianism. Our society, therefore, is engulfed in an absolutely intolerable sea of human rights. What happens is if everybody has equal rights, if everybody's personal rights are equal to everybody else's personal rights we've got a problem. Our Constitution says that God created all men equal and even though that's not true we believe it. They should be treated equal under the law, but they're not equal. They're unique! And some are designed by God to make decisions and some are designed by God to follow them. 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 was the standard. And the enlightenment and rationalism and the Renaissance changed that. The Bible wasn't the authority any more, and in its place was reason, human mind. And now all authority is resented. Authority of institutions, structure, moral authority, legal authority, people resist any power, any limits, any restraints, any control. They don't want any of it. They want autonomy, self-determination all of that stuff that was supposedly promised by the great Renaissance, by the birth of humanism. It's reached the point in our society where all behavior is equally okay, isn't it? It doesn't matter whether you're a lesbian, homosexual, whether you abort babies or don't, it doesn't matter, does it? I mean it doesn't matter what you do. Nothing really matters 'cause you can do whatever you want. That is the legacy of equal rights.

The Western world was molded after the Renaissance. The only thing that held America and part of Europe in check was the Reformation because while we were enjoying the freedoms that humanism brought we were still controlled by the theology of the Reformation and once Reformation theology died everything has gone amuck 'cause now what we've got is uncontrolled humanism. Even Martin Luther recognized this could happen when he said that the universities of his day were places where the training of youth and the fashions of Greek culture, where loose living was practiced, where little was taught of the Holy Scriptures and the Christian faith. He could see where that would lead. Today in major universities all across our nation there is no place for the word of God at all. They're hedonistic, humanistic, the tradition of the Renaissance with man at the center rather than God, with reason as king rather than Scripture has led us to where we are today. Freedom was defined as independence. Freedom was defined as equality. The self creates its own world so said Russo, Voltaire, so said Marx, so said Lenin. Total breakdown of authority ultimately comes then from Renaissance humanism. When Reformation theology was there it held it in check, or if you will when communistic power was there it held it in check. And so part of the world flopped into communism, part of the world was sort of held together by the church. Communism broke, the church has lost its power and we have now the real child of humanism. And so the legacy of all of this is hey who wants any authority? Don't tell me what to do. I'll do whatever I want. Here we are in the midst of this melu of chaos and we speak the authority of the word of God. Not popular! You know what's happened that sort of mentality has seeped into the church and that's why there are intolerances for authoritative teaching and preaching even in the church amazing as it is, but nonetheless I bring this to a conclusion, wow! Have I been talking that long? I bring this to a conclusion by saying look this doesn't change anything. It just elevates the responsibility, doesn't it? What are we going to give to this anti-authority culture? What are we going to give to a church that doesn't want to hear clear concise, precise truth? We're going to give them what God said to give them. We're going to give them the truth, the word of God. Nothing's changed. What Paul said to Titus is still the mandate. These things, the things that fit sound doctrine, the word of God, all Scripture profitable for doctrine, these things speak so they can hear and understand. Exhort so they can believe and hold as convictions, and reprove so they submit and obey and do it with all authority and let no one disregard you. Therein lies the mandate for the church. We speak the word of God and thus we speak the voice of God with authority. It is a gracious authority isn't it? It is a saving, sanctifying, glorifying authority. Do you chaff under the word of God? I don't. I rest in it. Don't you? I rejoice in it. It is not burdensome. His burden is light. His yoke is easy because he, by the power of the Holy Spirit, carries it for us and forgives all our failings, and carries all our burdens. This is a blessed, blessed word to us. Authoritative yes, burdensome no.

Father, thank you again for this day that we've shared together as a church family, as we've looked at the matter of authority and spoken of its centrality in the life of the church. Help us, Lord, to hear your word, believe it, and obey it. For your name, Amen.

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