

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

A Call for Authoritative Preaching

Scripture: Titus 2:15

Code: 90-350

Thanks to John Martin for his wonderful ministry among us in so many, many ways. Many of you might not know but John writes original music for every television broadcast for Grace To You. It's a tremendous, tremendous blessing and if you haven't been able to watch, you need to do that without staying home from church on Sunday morning. We're on at 9:30 in the morning if you can figure out a way to get a recording of it. We're having a wonderful response to the television program. More than that, we're proclaiming the Word of God through the medium of television in a way that's very unusual and telling stories of transformed lives along with it. It's just been a great opportunity the Lord has granted to us. We're thankful for everybody around here. Tom Patton, you sometimes see him around, he's been the announcer on the program and they're shooting him here and there on the campus on Sunday. And John does the music. It's just a wonderful, wonderful blessing.

My son-in-law, Kory Welch, is even as we speak in Mexico City because we're going to feature in one of our programs upcoming Josiah Groman(?) and his testimony. As you know, he's a missionary down there in Mexico City. He was with us a couple of Sunday nights ago. And so, these are the stories that we want to tie into the program to show how the Word works in people's lives in very dramatic ways.

I want you to open your Bible, for a moment, to a text of Scripture that we're going to look at. It's a very brief one. In fact, I'm just going to read you two verses in the little epistle of Paul to Titus...Titus, a very brief but a very important epistle. And perhaps among the several things that stand out about this epistle is one in particular that is very striking for its brevity and its clarity.

In chapter 2 and verse 1, we read this, "But as for you," this is the word from Paul to Titus who has responsibility for ministry. "As for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Then the Apostle Paul goes on to address women and men in several categories. Even speaks to slaves and their responsibilities.

But then coming down to verse 15, he again goes back to addressing Titus. He had just said, "Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine," and now he says this, verse 15, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority...with all authority. Let no one disregard you."

That is very stunning. That is a verse that is inescapable. If you are going to be a minister of the Word of God, if you're going to be in the responsibility of leading the church, you must speak the things fitting for sound doctrine. You must speak, exhort and reprove in these things with all

authority, allowing no one to disregard you. And, of course, the word that jumps out and strikes us is the word “authority.”

The preacher, based on what we hear in this verse, is not giving opinions, he is not giving insights or ideas that come from his own mind, his own intuition. He is not simply sharing insights. He is not offering some kind of optional counsel. There may be elements of that in what he does, but primarily his responsibility is to bind people to the authority of that which reflects sound doctrine.

And by the way, the word “authority” is worthy of some attention. It is *epitago* which is a form of *epitasso*, which is essentially a military term that means command. And here is an intensified form of that. In fact, wherever you see *epitago* in the New Testament, every other time it is translated commandment, or command. For some reason here the translators decided to soften that a little bit and they substituted the word “authority.” But it should read, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all command.”

In other words, the preacher is in the position of commanding people. We don't use that word very often with regard to any kind of ministry, or any kind of teaching of the Word of God. We are somewhat reluctant to put ourselves in the position of a commander who is commanding people to respond by hearing, believing and acting upon what we say. But that is precisely what the Apostle Paul tells Titus to do.

Now it is not a different world in which Titus lives. It is a very unruly world. It doesn't take you very long if you're wandering through this little epistle to find out that it is indeed an unruly world. Go down to verse 10 of chapter 1 and you will find that there are many rebellious men, there are many empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, connected with Judaism. They must be silenced because they're upsetting whole families, teaching things they shouldn't teach for the sake of sordid gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own said Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons, this testimony is true. So you've got a society of people who can be characterized as liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons, not the kind of people who want to bring themselves readily under someone's authority.

You have a society, or a culture, where all kinds of things are being taught that are not true, that are being advocated by men who are rebellious against the truth, who talk but have nothing to say who are deceivers. You even have further instruction given to them of the kind of people to reprove in verse 13. “Reprove these kinds of people severely that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.” Other people are commanding. The false teachers are commanding. The circumcision party from Judaism with their work/salvation system, a system of salvation by the law, they're commanding, they're laying the heavy commands of Scripture on people as a means to salvation. “There are others who do this...others who, verse 16, profess to know God but in effect are detestable, disobedient, worthless for any good deed.” So it is not an easy world. It is not a world where people instantly roll over when

the truth is proclaimed. What is essential is you speak that which fits sound teaching, wholesome doctrine. And you do so with authority...with authority. Speak as one who commands.

Now this is not the only place where this kind of instruction is given. In fact, in 1 Timothy chapter 4 we find a very similar emphasis, 1 Timothy chapter 4, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture to exhortation and teaching." Of course, that defines our ministry. We are to explain the text and apply the text, after having read the text. Back in verse 11 he says, the NAS says again, "Prescribe." There is this aversion to saying what the Word is, it's the word "command," "Command and teach these things." Here again you have a very similar instruction given to Timothy as given to Titus that the one who preaches the Word of God is in the position of one who commands others to be obedient. We are put in a position of commanding people. We speak with authority.

Now this was true of Jesus, and I think it might be an interesting thing for us to get a little bit of insight into that. You remember at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 7, the response that was the sort of one phrase or one sentence description of their reaction to Jesus, He was teaching them as one having authority. He was teaching them as one having authority...having authority, possessing authority in Himself. He spoke with authority. Again the same thing is in Mark 1:22, they were amazed at His teaching. He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Then in verse 27 after Jesus had confronted a demon-possessed man, it says they were all amazed so that they debated among themselves saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority and He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey Him. And immediately the news about Him went out everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee." Here was someone who spoke with authority. Authority which He Himself possessed, unlike the scribes who always quoted somebody else as the authority. He possessed authority Himself. Luke chapter 4, "Amazement came upon them all," verse 36, "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.'"

John also refers to this authority as do those writers of the gospel, Matthew, Mark and Luke. And in John 7 and verse 46, the officers who were sent to arrest Jesus and did not were asked by the chief priests and Pharisees, "Why did you not bring Him? The officers answered, 'Never did a man speak the way this man speaks.'" He spoke as one who had authority.

And it was such a compelling authority that people didn't breach Him. Even when they ?? ?? the dispatch for the purpose of arresting Him, they couldn't get past His stunning authority. The scribes and elders in Mark chapter 11 came to Him and began saying to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things? What is the source of this authority that You have? Authority to say the things You say? Authority over demons, and unclean spirits." Was it two thousand years of Jewish tradition, was it some rabbi who lived long before Jesus, was it the reigning theology that gave Him His authority? Was it the popular views of the

people with which He was in agreement that gave Him His authority? Was it His office, His title, His training? Was it His style? Was it His communication skill? His oratorical ability? What exactly was the source of Jesus' authority?

Well you know the answer to the question, but it still needs to be emphasized. Back to the first text I mentioned in John, John chapter 7, and it becomes very apparent. John 7 verse 14, "When it was the midst of the feast, Jesus went to the temple began to teach. The Jews therefore were marveling saying, 'How is this man become learned, having never been educated?' Jesus therefore answered them...verse 16, John 7... 'My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of My teaching whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory, but he who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true and there is no unrighteousness in Him.'"

He says simply and clearly, what I'm saying to you is not from Me, but from the One who sent Me and anyone who is willing to do the will of the One who sent Me will know the teaching comes from Him. In the eighth chapter of the gospel of John and verse 28, Jesus 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," and then this important statement, "I speak these things as the Father taught Me." Same chapter verse 38, "I speak the things which I have seen with My Father." Verse 40, "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God."

And a couple of verses in the twelfth chapter, verses 49 and 50, "I did not speak on My own initiative but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment what to say and what to speak. Therefore...verse 50...the things I speak I speak just as the Father has told Me." He spoke as one having authority. He spoke unlike anyone they had ever heard. He wasn't quoting rabbis. He was simply speaking. And what He was speaking seemed to have its origin in Himself and He says it is true, "I and the Father are one and I speak only what the Father tells Me to speak." Being one with the Father, He Himself was as authoritative and as much the source of what He said as the Father. But in His humiliation, He humbling Himself gives full credit to the Father as the source.

The preachers authority then comes when he speaks the Word of God. And to speak the Word of God is to command. That's why in the Great Commission when we think about doing missions in the world, that's a hot topic today. You hear so many people talking about missions, they've coined a new word "missional" which is the same old word "mission" with just a different ending, that's supposed to be a little more sophisticated. But the bottom line in missions if you go back to where the bottom line is in the Great Commission, Jesus says this, "Go therefore," the end of Matthew, "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." We go to command people. The preacher's authority is the Word of God and the Word of God is binding and thus we are in a position of commanding people to respond.

Now go back to Titus 2:15, let's look a little closer at that verse for a moment. You will see that we are to speak and exhort and reprove not with limited authority, not with a little authority, not with a lot of authority, but with all authority. Whenever you speak the Word of God, it is authoritative. This authority is comprehensive. It is limitless, as long as it is the Word of God. It doesn't matter what portion of the Word of God, what part of the Word of God, or what truth of the Word of God, it all comes with authority.

That is why there is, I hope, there is a note of authority in the preaching that you hear at this church. We're not here to give you insights into things. We're not here to tell you what our intuition has taught us. We're not here to give you the opportunity to hear the end result of our human reasoning. We are here to tell you what the Word of God says. What the Word of God means. And to let you know that you are under obligation to respond to it or else...cause we, as the representatives of the Lord of the church, give you His commands. We have been delegated that authority.

Now let me give you three elements of this authoritative kind of teaching which is, by the way, not a common kind today, necessarily, but it ought to be. We'll give you three elements of this authoritative preaching. Number one is the content. You go back to the beginning of the verse, "These things..." You will find that again back at the beginning of the chapter... "These things." And what are "these things?" All the things that are fitting for sound doctrine, all the things that are fitting for sound doctrine, avoiding the kind of teaching that is indicated in the latter half of chapter 1, the kind of teaching that comes from rebellious men, empty talkers, deceivers, the kind of teaching that upsets whole families, the things they should not be taught...should not be taught but are taught for the sake of sordid gain...the kind of things that could be classified as Jewish myths and the commandments of men who turn away from the truth. These are the kinds of things to avoid and the things to teach are all those things that are suitable for sound doctrine. That would be then all the things that are revealed in Scripture. All these things revealed in Scripture. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable."

Over and over again, the Apostle Paul in his letters to Timothy says, "Preach the Word, Teach the Word, Be faithful to the Word, Learn the word, Study the Word, Divide the Word." That is the source of our content...content...these things. This brief passage, just these couple of verses out of the second chapter of Titus confine and conform and set the borders and the boundaries for what we do. It's just so very clear. This brief passage limits the ministry to very narrow boundaries, very narrow boundaries. Preach what Scripture has revealed as the Word of God and command people to hear it, to believe it, and to respond to it. That's pretty simple, and yet so often avoided. Paul was demanding this as the foundation of all ministry.

So the content. The method, what is the method? Well you can't miss it either, he says, "Speak...speak," *laleos* simply means say it so people hear it...say it so people hear it. And then he adds, "And exhort." So we say it so that you hear it, which means understanding. This is the first

objective. Take the Word of God and you're now going to command people to respond to the Word of God which assumes that they will understand the Word of God. That's speak it so they hear it and understand it.

Then it's not just that simple or I would get up here and read the Scripture and then say to you, "This means this," and that would be it. No, there's a necessary exhortation, *parakaleois* the very common New Testament word translated exhortation. And it is the power of the preacher using all biblical means at his disposal to bring to bear what the person understands upon their life. So you're moving to believing and appropriating.

I don't want you just to understand in the sense that you get the point or you get the interpretation or you get the doctrine that is taught. I want that to press against your soul so that you embrace it with a desire to appropriate it. And then he adds a negative word, "And reprove," *elencho*. That means create conviction.

In other words, there is built into effective preaching an understanding of the Word of God. There is built into effective preaching a compelling using all the means that are biblical, illustrations here and there and even outside of that to illustrate biblical truth, to help you to apply it and then the final impact is to let you know that if you do not receive, believe and apply this, you are in some serious spiritual danger. Reproof, put people under conviction, make them feel the weight of their own rebellion. Make them feel the weight of their own resistance. Make them feel the weight of their own spiritual pride that will not bend the knee.

So we are preaching for clarity of understanding. We are preaching for person appropriation. And we're preaching for conviction, the weight of conviction on the heart so as to move the person who has heard and understand and believed in the direction of full submission and full obedience.

Now you can see here that this methodology is crystal clear. We have the things which come from God that constitute sound doctrine in the Scripture. Our responsibility is to disseminate these things to people. How do we do that? By speaking. There are speaking gifts. Preaching is still the right way. It's still the right way, the God-ordained way. Speak and then having spoken the truth, come alongside and put the pressure on, exhort them to believe it and apply it. And then hit them with the conviction that if they do not, there is a price to pay.

So we see the content and the method. And the extent would be the third point, the extent. The end of verse 15 says this, "Let no one disregard you....let no one disregard you." Now this looks at the extent in two ways in a kind of peripheral way and at a very directed point. "Let no one disregard you," simply in the first case means that there is no one who is outside the responsibility of obedience. There is no one for whom the Word of God does not apply. There is no one who is outside the responsibility to respond to the Word of God. If you are a non-believer, you are still commanded by God to repent. God commands all men everywhere to repent, Acts 17. No one is outside that circle. Let no one disregard you, on the peripheral sense or the outside sense, that

includes everyone.

But you can also look at it another way. "Let not one person disregard you." Bring it to bear on everyone because it does apply to everyone. And press it home with each one. We are, in that sense, called to hold everyone to the truth. The word "disregard" is quite an interesting word, *periphrono*. It means to evade. It means to rationalize. *Phrono, peri...phronois* to think from which we get the idea of our thought processes, *peris* around. Let no one think around you, let no one imagine that they can evade you by their rationalizations, by their self-justifications. Hold them to the truth. Make sure that no one escapes their personal responsibility before God to enact in obedience to the truth.

One of the wonderful testimonies in the life of the Thessalonian church, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, was this, "We constantly thank God that when you received from us the Word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God which also *energeia*, energizes its work in you who believe. You accepted it for what it is, the Word of God. Hold them to the truth.

The content...everything revealed by God which constitutes sound teaching. The method...speaking so that people can understand. Then applying...so that they can believe and embrace. And then rebuking...so that they feel the weight and the guilt and the conviction of an unresponsive heart.

Now this doesn't fly really well in the world that we live in today which is so resistant to authority. And it also can be very confusing because there are people who misunderstand this issue of authority. So let me go from this biblical view to a wider sense to help you a little bit to understand the narrowness of this. Let me give you some categories of mistaken authority, okay? Where people think there is authority and there is not.

First, let's talk about personal authority...personal authority. There are people today, and you have heard them, who think they have power in themselves equal to that of Jesus and the Apostles. In fact, there are people today who think they can heal...or would like you to think they can heal. Who would like you to think they have power over demons. There are people who would like you to think they can raise the dead and have done it. The power to transcend this world to be elevated personally and privately into the mind of God to hear secrets from God that He's never said to anybody else. There are people going around commanding Satan as if they had authority. Commanding demons as if they had authority. Taking authority over disease. Have you heard them do that? "Cancer, I command you this..." "Heart disease, I command you this..." "Some of you are watching me on television and I command that illness to depart from you." "I command your poverty to go away," etc., etc., etc. These are people who live in an illusion. Some of them may even believe the illusion because they've lived it so long. Others know their phoney, as long as you believe the illusion, that's enough for them.

They are commanding where they have no authority. They have no authority over Satan. They have no authority over demons. They have no authority over disease. They have no authority over death. They have no authority over God. They have no authority over the Holy Spirit. I heard one the other day commanding God. "God, I send you to do this and this." That's scary.

Now, some of them think they have authority over sins. You can go into a little box with a priest on the other side who thinks he has authority to forgive your sins. You tell your sin through a little screen and he will tell you if you go say so many Hail Mary's and do whatever you're supposed to do, whatever the prescription is for that particular sin that you have confessed, that he has the power in himself to give you the formula by which your sins can be forgiven. In Mark 2:10, "Only the Son of Man has authority to forgive sin."

This kind of stuff comes from pride, self-confidence. It comes from deceivers, spiritual frauds, charlatans, fakes, phonies. It's a false and foolish and proud illusion. It is none existent. There is no such thing as personal authority. I do not have authority at all personally over Satan, God, sin, disease, death. I do not have authority to tell you something is true just because I think it's true. I do not have authority to tell you that even though something's not in the Bible, I speak it with authority because God told me that. When you hear somebody say that, you're listening to a false teacher. There is no personal authority. None of us have any legitimate personal authority.

Remember Acts 19, sons of Sceva? Going around trying to cast out demons and the demon said, "Jesus, we know of Paul, we know, but who are You?" We know when we've met those who have authority. And, of course, Jesus had authority and He delegated it to that unique and small elite group of Apostles who are no longer with us. We have no personal authority, none whatsoever. I have none. I have no greater spiritual connection to God than you do. Sometimes people say to me, "Would you pray for me because I know God probably answers your prayers more than somebody else's." That's ridiculous. I don't have any access to God that you don't have. I don't hear voices from heaven. Angels don't serve me lunch. I have no connections to God that you don't have. I read the Bible just like you read the Bible. God works in my life just like He works in your life. I have no personal authority whatsoever. I have no spiritual intuition. I get no messages from heaven. I'm not listening for the voice of God and hearing things that are unique to our conversations.

Secondly, there is the mistaken idea of church authority. Many judge the church to be the authority in spiritual matters. This, too, is an illusion of false and destructive illusion and there are institutions that command where they have absolutely no jurisdiction. And, of course, the illustration with which we're most familiar is the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church tried to take all authority over the souls of men and nations. The Roman Catholic church established its authority based upon its own identity, not on the Bible. In the case of Roman Catholicism, the church reigns over the Bible.

The Magisterium...the Magisterium, what is that? It's the collective apostolic succession, it's the apostolic succession Papal infallibility and continuing revelation through church councils that stand in

authority over the Bible so that the church is the only legitimate interpreter of the Bible. The Church has the only right to interpret the Bible and the Church can also add to the Bible all of its own traditions. So in Roman Catholicism you have two sources of revelation, you have the Bible and tradition. And tradition is over the Bible because tradition is not only a body of so-called revelation in addition to the Scripture, but tradition is the composite interpretation of Scripture.

So, the collection of creeds, traditions, Articles of Faith, ex cathedra pronouncements by the Popes and articles by councils constitutes the Magisterium, the great authority of the institutional Church, the collective authority of the institutional Church embodied in these things that stand in judgment over the Bible and over everyone. Doctrines like Purgatory, the Treasury of Merit, Penance, perpetual virginity and co-redemptive work of Mary are all deemed to be true not because of the Bible, but because of the Church Magisterium. The Roman Catholic Church, the institution itself and in particular the head of the church who is the Pope, is in its own eyes the final authority and has every right to command people and even through the years has been eager to kill the people who questioned that authority. That is, of course, what brought about the Reformation. When the Reformers began to assault the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and reassert the sole authority of Scripture, that's what led to the Reformation. That's the protest that created Protestantism.

The truth is, the Bible says that the church is under the Word. Whereas these institutions say the Word is under the church. Even Eastern Orthodoxy claims authority by liturgy over the teaching of Scripture. They even claim to have authority over the papacy, they being the true church in their view. The Orthodox Church claims it has authority by the infallibility of seven councils, from Nicaea in 325 to Nicaea in 787. The councils in between constituting seven councils have established the authority, that authority resides in the Church over Scripture. They agree with Rome though they are separated. They agree with Rome that the Church speaks infallibly in tradition and in Articles of Faith and is the authority over all interpretation of Scripture.

True Christianity has always said that the Word is not under the church, the church is under the Word. God is the final authority. God is the only authority. He has given His authoritative commands by divine revelation, it's all in one book, nowhere else. That book is the Bible, the only authority spiritually in the universe, the trinitarian God, all binding spiritual commands come from Him through the Scripture alone, not tradition, not the Book of Mormon, not the Pearl of Great Price, not the Doctrine and the Covenants, not the Science and Health and Key to the Scriptures, not any other document. And so you know the leaders of Israel were condemned in Mark 7:8 and then again in the book of Matthew which records the same thing. "You have substituted the traditions of men for the commandments of God."

There is no church authority. No church has any weight of binding authority over men's souls...not the Catholic Church, not the Eastern Orthodox Church, not any other church, no church, to say

nothing of all the false cults that reign authoritatively over the souls of people. No word outside the Bible is authoritative in the realm of the soul. I don't care what document it's in, no word outside a true expression of biblical revelation has any authority over men's souls. And so, God has demanded that His Word be heard, that it be believed, that it be obeyed. And so we speak it. And having spoken it, we exhort you to embrace it. And then we endeavor to convict you if you resist.

I suppose we could identify a third authority, we could call it rational authority. There are so many today who set aside the Bible and give their sort of ideas, sprinkled with the words God and Jesus and occasionally even with a Bible verse, if they can find the right translation saying the right thing to fit their idea. Sure we need our minds. God is rational. His Word is rational. And we understand it rationally. But our reason has to be applied to the Word of God. There is no spiritual benefit for us to use our minds to try to discern spiritual reality apart from Scripture.

And this can get...this can go from the cultic to the wacky. I remember a very prominent leader, I was walking along with him in one of the centers. This is an evangelical leader. And he said to me, "Do you believe the Bible allows for divorce?" And we were walking in the woods at one of his places. And I said, "Well, Jesus said don't get divorced except for adultery. That doesn't seem too complicated to me. And the Apostle Paul says if an unbeliever departs, let him depart, you're not in bondage any longer. So if there's an adultery situation or if an unbeliever departs, that severs the bond." I said, "What about you? Do you believe in divorce?"

He said, "Absolutely not, no divorce ever under any circumstances any time."

I said, "Really."

He said, "That is right."

I said, "Well why do you believe that?"

He said, "See those Canadian geese over there." And when he said that, I knew I was in trouble. What? Canadian geese? He said, "Yes, we have a whole pen of Canadian geese over there and we clip their wings and we put a fence around them because if we don't do that, they'll get out. And see, you can't have a hole in the fence or they'll all get out. And that's why I don't believe in divorce...cause if there's a hole, then all the people will rush in it."

I said, "What are you talking about?" Now there are some people who would say, "Wow, rich, deep, profound." Canadian geese have nothing to with anything.

Well that person's entire ministry was fraught with theology by analogy, by which you could prove absolutely anything. To him this is rational authority. That's a reasonable thing. You have a hole in the fence, they'll all get out. If God put a hole in the marriage fence, everybody would run out. And

that's how he came to perceive and to concoct a doctrine and to write a book about it based upon that kind of crazy stuff.

We're not saying don't use your mind. But we are saying if you want to know what is true about divorce, you don't need to go get a bunch of Canadian geese and build a fence, clip their wings and see what happens. Just go to the Bible. And yet there's so much of this theology by analogy...theology by intuition. You can listen to these false teachers speak and it sounds reasonable, it sounds sensible, it has to or they wouldn't succeed, would they? It's just not biblical. It sounds good. It sounds inviting. It has a certain sense to it. Of course. But reason is useless apart from revelation. Man by wisdom, 1 Corinthians 2, knew not God. The best that human wisdom can do brings you short of what comes only by revelation.

One more, a fourth, we'll call it experiential authority. This is another very, very popular one. This is authority that comes from people's quote/unquote spiritual experiences. I remember one lady said to me many years ago, she said, "Well personally, I don't really care what the Bible says, I know what I've experienced." What? So your experience is normative? So whatever it is you think you've experienced, or whatever you perceive you experience, or whatever you intuitively think may have been a spiritual experience is normative? Boy, that's a long way from the Apostle Paul who said, "I've been to heaven and back, but it's useless to tell you about it. It's not helpful," 2 Corinthians 12. It's not helpful.

Why? Can't be proven, can't be repeated. Even a real experience of going to heaven and coming back, Paul says, is pointless to tell you. God had a purpose for me in that unique and miraculous event in the life of that very unique man but it was useless to try to draw some permanent conclusion out of it. It couldn't be verified. It couldn't be articulated. It couldn't be repeated. There is no authority in spiritual matters because feeling is not knowing. Feeling is feeling. It is not knowing. You don't feel the truth, you know the truth. It's about the mind and not the emotion.

So God's authority has nothing to do with someone's personal authority, in an office, or a title. One of the things you see in all Roman Catholicism and other forms of aberrant Christianity is people wearing lots of garb. You know what that's about? That's about intimidation...that's what it's about. It's about making you think they're holier than you are. And the higher up the chain of command you go in those systems of religion, the more lavish the garb becomes to represent imagined authority that is non-existent.

There's no personal authority. There's no institutional authority. There's no rational authority. There's no experiential authority. The only authority that is legitimate is the Word of God. One writer put it this way, "The Bible is the real preacher and all the role of the man in the pulpit is to simply let the passage say its piece through him. 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." So that's a good way to say it.

What do I do every week? Take a passage of Scripture and try to get myself completely out of it before I show up here, try to strip out all suppositions, strip out all assumptions, all pre-conceived notions, go to the bare bones of that text without regard to myself. You will never hear me say, "As I was studying this, the Lord told me...the Lord showed me..." You'll never hear me say, "The Lord confirmed to me that this is what it meant." There's no such spiritual experience. Nor will I ever say to you, "I'm the preacher and I'm telling you, this is what it means. And if I say it, you have to believe it." You don't. What you need to do is check it out like the noble Bereans and see if it's really so. I want to be under scrutiny.

One of the greatest compliments I ever got in my life, I was introduced by a very wonderful friend, preacher who introduced me this way into a conference, he said, "This is my friend, John MacArthur, who will always change his mind if I can show him where he's wrong." Of course. There's only one authority in my life and that's the Word of God. Preaching that doesn't display divine authority both in its content and its manner is not the substance but the shadow of the real thing.

If you have a preacher who doesn't come to you and bear upon your soul with great weight and clarity and conviction the truth of Scripture, that's a shadow, that's not the substance of a real preacher. To preach is to be the voice of God. Anything else is a hindrance and an obstruction to the voice of God. Bad theology, bad exegesis, bad interpretation, aberrant ideas, heresies, personal and spiritual insights that are not connected directly to the interpretation of a text, obstruct Scripture...obstruct Scripture. So the only preaching God desires is authoritative commanding preaching. It doesn't mean you're abusive, abrasive, harsh, you do it, I trust, you speak the truth in love and with grace and with kindness and with patience and with mercy. But it is nonetheless the truth.

There is today a lot of popular preaching, not a lot of powerful preaching. And the biggest hindrance is the preacher...the preacher. Any self-projection undermines divine authority. Any self-absorption on the part of the preacher erodes true authority. If you can't feel the weight of God, then the preacher has failed. He's in the way. If you can't feel the conviction of the Word of God, the preacher is in the way. You may like the preacher. You may enjoy the preacher. You may laugh and weep with him. You may be engaged with him. But when you walk away, if you do not feel the burdens and the joys of the Word of God, the preacher has been in the way.

One writer put it this way. "If by his words and manner the preacher focuses his 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 channeling any sense of divine authority. What he doesn't feel himself, he cannot mediate to others. If he is trying to impress you with himself as a preacher, then he's not mediating divine authority." In fact, that's the famous line by James Denny that you cannot convey the impression both that you're a great preacher and Jesus Christ is a great Savior, take your choice. God projection and Christ projection rather than self-projection is the duty of the preacher.

Now this authority, as I said, must be brought to bear on this day in which we live. I run into this all the time. People are stunned when I give a specific answer. If I'm on a talk show, radio interview, and somebody asks me a question and I say, "So and so and so and so is the answer" Oh, that's pretty straight forward." Well that's what the Bible says. People are kind of stunned by that. People who come here and think that maybe I'm overbearing, which happens, are not used to having someone speak to them spiritually with real authority. They maybe have been exposed to Christianity in those non-authoritative environments, the mish-mash of ideas and spiritual experiences that are pawned off on them as if they are legitimate, tend to mitigate against the single, clear interpretation of Scripture spoken authoritatively.

Why is it so hard for people to accept the authoritative Word of God? I'll give you a few reasons. Poor preaching, they're used to poor preaching that lacks power and authority. Low expectations, you know what people expect out of a sermon? They don't expect an hour of intense expression of the Word of God. They have low expectations. They expect to be briefly interested with a few stories and some psychological bumps in the upward way, nothing harsh, nothing judgmental.

Another thing, people are used to preaching that I would call sort of mildly spontaneous, off the cuff. They don't have a lot of appetite for something that is carefully prepared, thought out, systematic, profound, challenging, rich, insightful, provocative, or in any sense deep. They have...many of them have no theological frame of reference. You can take a passage, come to a church like this or other churches where the Word of God is taught this way, and you can teach an expository message and they don't even have a paradigm to put it in. You know, they're waiting for the next good story. They're waiting for the next joke. They're looking at their watch. What is going on? This guy has been talking for an hour, meandering all through this. Where are the good stories? Can't we sing again, or something? In their spiritual world, there is no paradigm for this so it seems a message harsh and irrelevant and out of touch and isolated.

And, of course, then you have the general sort of anti-authority mentality that reigns supreme in our society. People don't want to be under anybody's authority because they're having a consuming love affair with personal freedom. Commanding people to hear, commanding people to respond, commanding people to feel the weight and the conviction of disobedience, that's out of touch with the way people want to live their lives. But nonetheless, we are still called to speak with authority. And we do that.

A final thought. We...we have this incredible privilege to preach with authority. But at the same time, we have to exercise patience. And that's so important. Paul says this, 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the Word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort." It sounds quite similar to Titus. Then this, "With great patience...with great patience."

We don't mitigate the authority. We don't apologize for the authority. But we are patient with people's response. If there's anything you want to find in your ministry, it's speaking the truth in love. Speaking the truth, that's the authority. Love, that's the patience...that's the patience. I would hope and I would pray that in all the years that Grace Church has been ministering that we would be known as a place where there is no equivocation on the truth, where the Word of God is proclaimed as the sole authority, where it is preached with clarity and with conviction. And at the same time, that this church would be known for its love and its patience in the struggle that we all have to come by the power of the Spirit in conformity to that which is commanded of us. And I know that the true people of God do not chafe under this authority, they embrace it. Because it is an authority designed to bless, right? Obedience brings blessing.

That's why you're here. In many environments, if I said, "Hey, come tonight, I'm going to speak on authority," you could expect no one, not here. Why? Because you understand and you love and you eagerly embrace the truth of God. You have confessed Him Lord, as Lord. He is the authority in your life. And what He commands is what you desire because you want the fullness of His blessing. And that's as it should be. This kind of authority doesn't empty the church, it grows the church, it only grows under the authority of the Lord of the church and by His Word.

I may say a little more about this next week. A few things that I left unsaid tonight. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You again for Your precious Word. It's all we have. That's it. If we don't open the Word of God and unleash its truth and its power, we have nothing. We have no authority, we have no truth, therefore we have no life. The Word is everything. We want to handle the Word with clarity, handle it with accuracy so as to unleash its power on souls by which the Holy Spirit saves, by which the Holy Spirit sanctifies, by which you assemble your redeemed and elect church for Your own glory. Father, we thank You for placing us under Your Word. What a joy, what a privilege. Blessing upon blessing, upon blessing grips our souls as we respond to Your commands, to think with the mind of Christ and to walk as He walked. Be glorified in us, Lord, be glorified in us as we remain faithful in Your Son's name. Amen.

I was thinking about the blessing of the seminary. We have now about a thousand graduates of the Master's Seminary. It's happened in just a few years...a thousand graduates. They're all over the country, all over the world, scattered across the globe. And they all understand what I've just told you. They understand it. That's why they came here. And they're reproducing it in churches, schools, training centers, in countries scattered around the world, training more people to understand what I've told you. They understand that this is the authority and that their role is to be capable of opening this Word from God and bringing its truth with clarity and power to bear on the souls of men and women. I thank the Lord that we can have the opportunity not just to do this here, but to train men year after year after year to do this wherever the Lord takes them in the world. Pray for the seminary, pray for the students that are there, pray for the students that are out, it's a growing force for which we are thankful as we are for all those churches and all those schools that train men to do

just this.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).