

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE MAN OF GOD

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When we Baptists consider the position of the Roman church and its doctrines regarding the authority of its priesthood (especially the authority of the pope speaking *ex cathedra*), we are forced to ask certain questions: What is the authority of a pastor in a local church? Does he have greater authority than the other members of the body of Christ? What is the final authority for faith and practice within the local church?

We will answer the last question first. The final authority for faith and practice is the Word of God, *rightly divided*. When the apostle Paul was providing Timothy with some warnings and words of encouragement, he wrote:

But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect [complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

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I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (II Timothy 3:13-4:4)

The Word of God is indeed the final authority in all spiritual matters, because it bears the authority of its Author, the Holy Spirit of God, even though it was penned by men. Peter tells us that *holy men of old wrote as they were moved [borne along] by the Holy Spirit*. The fact of God's authorship is evident throughout all of Scripture and is especially evident in the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures that were fulfilled by Christ in His first advent. Man does not have the capacity to know the future in the minute details of prophetic Scripture. Such detail is known only to God. Man knows these things only by the revelation of God. Even then man does not know them perfectly. In this regard, Daniel tells us that many of the things the Lord prophesied through him, he did not understand. So in a manner similar to the apostle John in the Revelation, the Lord told him: *Go thy way Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end* (Daniel 12:9)

We stated that the final authority in spiritual matters is the Word of God, *rightly divided*. This brings us to the authority of the pastor as compared to the authority of the congregation. We are instructed of the apostle Paul in the matter of spiritual gifts. Paul makes it very clear in the twelfth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians that we believers are all members of the body of Christ, but, like the members of a body, we do not all have the same function. Then as he concluded the twelfth chapter of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul asked a series of rhetorical questions, which in their structure in the Greek text all required a negative answer:

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And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. (I Corinthians 12:28-31)

This chapter and particularly this text reveals that everybody in the local body of Christ is not capable of performing the functions of a pastor for one very important reason: the spiritual gifts necessary to function as a pastor were not given to everybody in the body, but each one was given a gift or gifts to be used for the overall good of the local body of Christ.

Incidentally the command to *covet earnestly the best gifts* in this text is a contradiction to Paul's entire argument in this chapter. The word covet is *zeloute* in the Greek text. *Zeloute* is a form of the word *zeloo* and can denote three different moods in the Greek language: indicative, imperative, or subjunctive. Because the spelling is the same for each of these moods, the only way that one can determine which mood is correct is by its context. Considering the context of this twelfth chapter, it should be obvious that you would not command someone to do something and then tell them that there was a better way of doing what you had commanded them to do; and then follow that with an elaborate discussion of the better way as Paul did in chapter thirteen of his letter to the Corinthians.

If this text were translated according to the context, then we would not have a command to desire the outward sign gifts, but an indicative statement that this was what they were doing, and because of that, Paul was showing them a better way. The better way, of course, was that whatever a man's spiritual gift or gifts are, they are to be exercised in the love of Christ, not in

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self-interest and self-aggrandizement.

The word *pastor* is an interesting word. A pastor is a shepherd. Jesus used sheep as an analogy of believers. He said, ... *the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name...* (John 10:3). Following the same Scriptural analogy, the apostle Paul spoke to the Ephesian pastors (elders) and said:

For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed [Greek: *poimaino*: shepherd] the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. (Acts 20:27-32)

In the natural world of shepherds and sheep, the shepherd has authority over the sheep. He sees that they are fed, watered, protected and led. Since the Lord and the apostle both used the natural analogy of a shepherd with his sheep to describe the relationship between the pastor and the congregation, we must learn from the natural relationship if we are to understand the spiritual relationship it was chosen to convey. In Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in his letter to the Ephesians he said:

But unto every one of us is given grace [i.e., a gift of grace] according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastor ... teachers; for the perfecting [equipping] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [i.e., complete; of a full age] man,

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unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:7-16)

This text, along with Paul's text in the twelfth chapter of first Corinthians, reveals that Christ not only gave each individual in His church a spiritual gift or gifts, He gave His church gifted men for the equipping of the church for the work of the ministry and for their spiritual maturity, so that they would no longer be babes in Christ; that they would no longer be subject to the deception of the Devil and his ministers; that together with the manifestation of the gifts of all the body, the body would be strengthened and built up.

The ministry of a pastor not only requires the gifts of discernment, leadership, faithfulness, diligence, etc., it requires that the man of God be a student of the Word of God. In this regard the apostles testified to the church at Jerusalem (when they had the problem with the Hebrew and the Grecian widows): ... *It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables* (Acts 6:2).

The primary ministry of the man of God is preaching and teaching the Word of God. Along with this, he has the responsibility of governing the local church. From the outset, in the church at Jerusalem, it can be seen that the apostles regarded their responsibility to the Word of God above the disposition of food to widows. That was a task that could be done by others in the church. Even so the task of serving widows was not taken lightly, and high spiritual qualifications were required of those who would become servants (i. e., deacons) in the church. It must be here

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noted that the Greek word translated *deacon* is a servant in the church, not a ruler of the church.

The apostle Paul, along with various companions, did pioneering work in establishing the gospel ministry around the world. They did the true *work of an evangelist*. They preached the gospel; won souls to Christ; baptized those who were saved; organized those saved into local churches; and instructed those individuals in the churches who manifested the gifts of the ministry with the fundamentals of the faith, that they might remain in the churches serving as pastors. Timothy and Paul had labored together in this ministry until Paul was imprisoned at Rome. So from Rome, Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him in this ministry, saying:

Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. (II Timothy 2:1-4)

Everyone assumes that salvation is accompanied with spirituality and understanding, but this is not true. The believer has the capacity for these things, but they require growth. Paul told the Corinthians that he *could not speak unto [them] as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ*, and Peter told the Jewish believers to whom he wrote: *But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...* (II Peter 3:18).

We have stated that each believer has a gift or gifts of the Spirit of God. Even so spiritual gifts, like natural gifts, must be developed. The believer must hear sound preaching and teaching from the Word of God so that he might grow in grace. This alone is at the basis of a genuine understanding of the believer's relationship with his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Growth in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ will produce a proper manner of thinking for the

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believer. He will learn to think in terms of the judicial reckoning of God, Who *calleth those things that are not as though they are*. Growth in grace will teach the believer he is in a battle between the flesh and the Spirit. Growth in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ will teach the believer his frailties; that it is possible for a believer to lose his spiritual perspective and think in the flesh. So, with growth, the believer will recognize *that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*.

Apparently Timothy had become slack in his own spiritual growth and gave less attention to the study of the Word of God than he previously had. Paul intimated, in his letters to Timothy, that Timothy had gotten himself involved in things which did not profit his ministry. Perhaps it was because of his Jewish heritage that he had become involved with Jewish mysticism; the pursuit of genealogical records (so important to the Jews); and other things which had sidetracked him from his study and proper interpretation of the Scriptures. These outside pursuits had precipitated a sense of shame in Timothy towards Paul and towards the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that Paul told him:

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. (II Timothy 1:8-9)

Timothy's misdirected pursuits had not disqualified him for the ministry to which he had been called, because *the gifts and callings of God are without repentance*. Nevertheless Timothy had allowed himself to be diverted from the ministry to which he had been called by neglecting the study of the Word of God. Timothy's possession of the spiritual gifts of the ministry did not

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preclude his need to fuel his gifts with a diligent study of the Word of God. Like Timothy, if we in the ministry are to speak with the authority of God, we must give ourselves to the study of the Word so that we do not speak by hearsay, but by the Word of God. So Paul simply directed Timothy to: *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth* (II Timothy 2:15).

So, with regard to authority, the man of God does not have authority simply because he is the man of God, but his authority comes by exercising his spiritual gifts in complete accordance with the Word of God. This is seen in Paul's instructions to Timothy and also in his rebuke of Peter. This came at Antioch in Syria, after the conclusion of Paul's first missionary journey into Asia. Peter came to Antioch and played the hypocrite in his relationship with the Gentile believers in Antioch, but he did not do this until certain ones came from James (Galatians 2:11-12). So when he acted contrary to the truth of the Word of God, Paul rebuked him before the entire congregation, saying:

... If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I [was] crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. (Galatians 2:14-21)

Paul was not given greater authority than Peter when he was saved and called of God.

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They both functioned as apostles in the church by the authority of Jesus Christ. However, when Peter acted contrary to the truth of the gospel as he did in this instance, Paul acted according to the truth of the Word of God and rebuked Peter.

This illustrates a very important principle: the man of God, speaking according to the truth of the Word of God, speaks with the authority of Jesus Christ. This authority was given in the great commission when Jesus said, *All power [authority] is given me in heaven and earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations....* While this commission was given to the church to be performed in every age until our Lord returns, the specific task of teaching and preaching falls to those who are given the gift of pastor-teacher. It is they who preach, baptize, and teach according to the authority of this commission. Thus, in every age, it is the pastor-teacher who has provided the congregation the things in the spiritual realm that a shepherd provides his sheep in the physical realm.

The flock might cry out, as Israel did, for flesh to eat because they are tired of the daily ministration of manna, but the manna is representative of the true bread that came down from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the living Word of God, and He is revealed in the written Word of God. Thus it is through the written Word, faithfully studied and preached, that the people of God are provided with all that they need. In the following collage of bits of Scripture an interesting picture is formed, a picture which reveals the true ministry of the man of God: *I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ ... Preach the Word; For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables; Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth;*

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nevertheless, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God; Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might; For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe; because, The just shall live by faith[,] And law is not of faith; So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God; But without faith it is impossible to please [God]; [F]or whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*

This brings us then to the authority of the church. The church is the body of Christ, left to minister to a lost world, until the Lord comes to receive it unto Himself. It is to maintain its separation from the corrupt religious systems of this world (many of whom claim to be believers in Jesus Christ, but are not), while, like our Lord, reaching out to the publicans, harlots, and sinners of this world. On the one hand, the pastor is to study and to know the Word of God so that he can faithfully preach and equip the church for the work of the ministry; on the other hand, the church, with its many members with spiritual gifts from God, does the work of the ministry. It is from the church that the resources for fulfilling the great commission are drawn. Thus the church and the pastor are interdependent to the work of God. One cannot exist without the other. They are like a good marriage: in harmony and love towards one another and the Lord Jesus Christ and dependent upon God (Who alone can give the increase), they are to bring forth children into the family of God.

Baptists have historically believed in congregational rule. This is too bad because this is one Baptist doctrine that will not stand the test of a *rightly divided* Word of God. In fact the apostle John, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, revealed in the Revelation that this

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is a doctrine God hates. In the letter to the church at Pergamos, Jesus said: *So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate* (Revelation 2:15). The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes is (by interpretation) the doctrine of congregational rule. We know this because the word *Nicolaitanes* is a compound in the Greek of two words. The first means to conquer and the second means laity. Thus it speaks of the laity conquering or ruling the church in lieu of the man of God.

One almost has to be against motherhood (in Baptist circles) to be against congregational rule. Nevertheless a careful examination of the Word of God will show that congregational rule is not Scriptural. A portion of Scripture, like Acts 1:15-26, viewed without regard to the context of the book of Acts and the call of the apostle Paul, provides the primary basis for the idea of congregational rule (through elections). Even so these same verses, in context, show the presumptuousness of the election of Matthias, who, after his election, is never mentioned again in the book of Acts.

Congregational rule subjugates a faithful pastor (who studies and knows the Word of God better than anyone in the congregation) to the whims of a congregation, which many times is like the Corinthian church to whom Paul wrote: *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ* (I Corinthians 3:1). We can see God's view of the usurpation of the authority of the man of God throughout the Scriptures, but it is overtly seen in the matter of Korah, Dathan and Abiram:

... Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: and they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: and they gathered themselves

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together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord? And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face: and he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even tomorrow the Lord will show who are his, and who is holy, and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. (Numbers 16:1-5, emphasis mine)

If we were to continue reading the account in the book of Numbers, we would see that God opened the ground and swallowed the leaders of this band against Moses and Aaron. Then He sent down fire from heaven to destroy the two hundred and fifty princes of renown. Even these acts did not dissuade the people. The congregation cried out against Moses and Aaron that they had destroyed the people of the Lord. God then sent a plague amongst the people that killed fourteen thousand and seven hundred of the people until Aaron was able to make an atonement to stop the plague. After that the Lord commanded Moses to take a rod from each of the princes of Israel to show whom the Lord had chosen. Aaron's rod *brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds* overnight. Aaron's rod was then placed in the Ark of the Covenant *to be kept for a token against the rebels*. Aaron's rod, along with the other items in the Ark of the Covenant, stood as testimony against Israel. They stood as testimony to their need of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ to blot out their transgressions against the Lord. (See Numbers chapters 16 and 17 for all of the details of this confrontation.)

I am sure that every congregation in the church age that believes in congregational rule would not want God to deal with them as He dealt with Korah, Dathan and Abiram, or with the two hundred and fifty famous princes in the congregation. The fire from heaven and the earth opening and swallowing the anarchist would not be a welcomed event in your average Baptist

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church, to say the least.

Later in the history of Israel, Israel rejected the authority of Samuel the prophet. God told him that they had not rejected him, but they had rejected Me (I Samuel 8:7). Then God told Samuel to give them the king they desired but protest solemnly. Similarly, as we have seen, the election Peter instigated in the first chapter of Acts also proved to be folly. As we have also seen, after Acts chapter one, Matthias is never spoken of again in the book of Acts or as an apostle anywhere in Scripture, but we do hear of God's replacement for the fallen Judas, Saul of Tarsus (who became the apostle Paul). In fact Paul alluded to the election in Jerusalem when he began his letter to the Galatians to reestablish his authority with the Galatians: *Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the father, who raised him from the dead)* (Galatians 1:1). The Scriptures refer to twelve apostles both before and after the death of Judas. The twelve after the death of Judas obviously included the apostle Paul, not Matthias.

In conclusion, in the church the pastor stands in the place of authority as long as he speaks according to a rightly divided Word of God. With authority comes responsibility. So in the seven letters to the seven churches in the second and third chapters of the Revelation, it is the pastor who is addressed for that which is right in the church and for that which is wrong. Each letter begins with: *Unto the angel of the church....* The meaning of the word *angel* in this context is *messenger*. The pastor is the messenger of the church, for it is he who brings forth the message of God to the church. This is borne out in the book of Hebrews, where we read: *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you* (Hebrews 13:17,

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emphasis mine).

As we close this abbreviated discussion, we will do so with Paul's instructions concerning a church's proper attitude towards its pastor in his first letter to the Thessalonians: *And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves* (I Thessalonians 5:12-13, emphasis mine). It appears then that the congregation is in subjection to the pastor and not the other way around, as in congregational rule.