

AUTHORITY

IN GOD'S CHURCH



VERNON SPARKS

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PREFACE

THE FINAL conflict of the Great Controversy is over whom man will obey. The whole world will be brought to this test. Eternal salvation will be determined by whether we obey the commandments and the will of God or the commands and the will of man.

Inspiration tells us that at the time of the French Revolution, Satan turned from the Papacy “to another power” as his principle means of combating the truth and authority of God's Word:

“When they shall have finished [are finishing] their testimony.” The period when the two witnesses were to prophesy clothed in sackcloth, ended in 1798. As they were approaching the termination of their work in obscurity, war was to be made upon them by the power represented as “the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit.” In many of the nations of Europe the powers that ruled in church and state had for centuries been controlled by Satan through the medium of the papacy. But here is brought to view *a new manifestation of satanic power*.

It had been Rome's policy, under a profession of reverence for the Bible, to keep it locked up in an unknown tongue and hidden away from the people. Under her rule the witnesses prophesied “clothed in sackcloth.” But *another power*—the beast from the bottomless pit—was to arise to make open, avowed war upon the word of God. *The Great Controversy*, 268, 269. (All emphases supplied unless otherwise noted).

Now that the Scriptures were in the languages of the common people, Satan could no longer depend upon the political powers of the earth to enforce the dogmas of the Papacy and therefore he turned to certain “teachings” in order to divert mankind from God's truths. Those teachings are still with us today and have proved very successful in accomplishing Satan's plans.

At the same time anarchy is seeking to sweep away all law, not only divine, but human. The centralizing of wealth and power; the vast combinations for the enriching of the few at the expense of the many; the combinations of the poorer classes for the defense of their interests and claims; the spirit of unrest, of riot and bloodshed; the world-wide dissemination of the same teachings that led to the French Revolution—all are tending to involve the

INTRODUCTION

Definition and Basis of Authority:

AUTHORITY is the “power to influence or command thought, opinion or behaviour.” *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1977 edition. Thus the words authority and power are in many ways and in many instances interchangeable.

Authority in the universe is derived from one source—God (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). There is no other being capable of comparison with God’s immortality, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. By reason of His creatorship and His continual sustenance of all the universe and of every living creature, the basis of His authority in the truest sense is unchallengeable. Thus all authority is derived from or permitted by Him.

There is however an even greater basis and better definition, though less comprehended, of God’s authority. When we understand why God created and why He sustains, we will better know the basis of His authority. Disinterested, unconditional love is the undergirding basis of God’s kingdom and thus the basis of His authority. This love will be the theme of the study of the redeemed throughout eternity.

Channels of Authority:

As in any well-ordered organization, God has a well-defined chain of command. God uses channels for His authority, channels of His own choosing:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. John 1:1–3.

Since the fall of Adam all communication from God to man has been through Christ the Creator—“The Word:”

After the transgression of Adam, the Lord spoke no longer directly with man; the human race was given into the hands of Christ, and all communication came through Him to the world. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 237.

Christ was appointed Mediator to win sinful man back to voluntary obedience to divine authority as based on God's character of love. All authority relating to this earth is vested in Christ. Christ has appointed a chain of command under Himself to be channels of His will and ways.

First in the chain of command under Christ is His written Word—the Scriptures—the Holy Bible. Christ Himself is their Author. Christ has revealed and recorded God's will and ways in His word. To the query "What is truth?" (John 18:38) comes the reply "Thy word is truth." John 17:17. The written Word of God is the revelation of God's power and authority which is to measure all other manifestations of power and authority. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah 8:20. The power and authority of God is in His Word—"the law and the testimony." Christ demonstrated this fact during His temptation in the wilderness. When Christ quoted scripture Satan was forced to recognize the supreme authority and power of God's Word. All other power and authority is to be measured by this Word. That which is in harmony with His Word is an extension of His power and authority and is to be related to as such.

The Holy Spirit is the next channel of authority. He is "next" in the sense that His counsel and guidance are to be tested by His previously given instruction as found in the Scriptures and Spirit of Prophecy. (See 1 John 4:1 and Isaiah 8:20.) When Christ ascended, the Holy Spirit was sent as a special emissary to this earth. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." John 16:13. To the receptive heart, the Holy Spirit transmits power to overcome inherited weakness and developed evils. He also gives understanding and guidance to the individual. This personal, direct revealing of God's will is always in harmony with God's Word. "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." Isaiah 30:21 The Holy Spirit works to bring man into harmony with God's will as expressed in the law and the testimony. He can give further guidance only to those who show a willingness to follow His previous guidance. Those who expect His blessing in spite of their disobedience to Him regarding the counsels given in the law and the

testimony are trying to work the Holy Spirit rather than their being worked by Him.

Another channel of divine authority is in Christ's created works. "A continual transgression of nature's laws is a continual transgression of the law of God. . . . God's love is still extended to the race; and He permits light to shine, enabling man to see that in order to live a perfect life he must obey the natural laws which govern his being." *Counsels on Health*, 20. The power of God's authority exercised by the Holy Spirit can countermand the laws of nature in a "miraculous" form, but mortal man defies natural law at his own peril. The natural laws are channels of the Creator's power or authority.

And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Revelation 12:17.

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Revelation 19:10.

For over a century the presence of "the testimonies"—the "Spirit of Prophecy," the divinely inspired writings of Ellen G. White—in the Seventh-day Adventist movement has been evidence that this is the remnant church. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah 8:20. The testimonies are a written expression of God's speaking to man. Thus they are a delineation of God's will for His remnant people and being in harmony with the Scriptures, they are also a channel of His authority. They are a measure of truth and right-doing (righteousness) for this remnant of time. The Spirit of Prophecy is another channel of divine authority.

From the time that Israel rejected the theocratic form of government and chose a king, God has administered this earth with a separation between the religious powers and the civil powers. "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's." Luke 20:25. Let no man join together that which God has put asunder. Christ's followers are to obey the civil powers in those areas delegated to them.

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.
1 Corinthians 12:28.

God has placed individuals in His church to administer His corporate body. The authority and power which they administer is not their own, but is delegated to them by God. He has delegated them to administer His work in harmony with “the law and the testimony.” They are channels for His authority.

Last but not least in God's chain of command is the individual follower of Christ. He or she is to obey all others in the chain of command only as they themselves are in harmony with those above them in the chain. All “Christ’s,” “Spirits” and other powers and individuals are to be measured according “to the law and to the testimony.” It is an all-or-nothing measurement, for much truth and little error is more misleading than total error. “If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isaiah 8:20. The person wholly surrendered to divine power and authority will be used of the Holy Spirit as a “chosen vessel” (see Acts 9:15) or channel of divine authority. Those who live and speak according “to the law and to the testimony” transmit God's will to those around them. God has assigned His followers the task of carrying His gospel of salvation “to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.” Commensurate with this humanly impossible task, He has made available to His people the supernatural power and authority of His Word and the Holy Spirit to carry out that commission. Usurpation of Authority:

There is a great controversy today as to who has the right to rule in this universe. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” Isaiah 14:12–14.

He [Satan] desired to usurp the throne of God. Failing in this, he has worked in darkness, in crookedness, in deception, to usurp his place in the hearts of men. He has set up his throne between God and man, to appropriate the adoration that belongs to God alone. *Ellen G. White Comments, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 1119.

Although Satan has no basis for authority (the only things he has created and sustains are sin, discord, disease and death, and then only through the forbearance of God) he led one third of the heavenly host and Adam and Eve to join him in his rebellion against the legitimate Supreme Ruler of the universe. His kingdom is based on disobedience to truth (God's authority), falsehoods, self-will, coercion, and force. It is manifested by a desire to be served rather than to serve. Those who utilize the principles of his kingdom will in the end be found to have been promoting that kingdom.

Those powers or individuals who do not live or speak in harmony with "the law and the testimony" have self on the throne of their lives, thus usurping God's authority. By their example and words in disobedience to God they are leading others to disobey. When they lead others to follow or carry out the plans, methods, or traditions of man rather than those of God, they are installing man in the place of God. They are following the path of Romanism and the great usurper. They have set up their throne and that of Satan between God and man.

Chapter 3

Leadership's Relation to Authority

THOSE in leadership roles are sworn in by Christ to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Any variance from this commitment is a misuse of their position and is to put human opinion before that of God.

Christ on this earth was the special emissary of God the Father. He did not communicate His own opinions, thoughts or words but only those of His Father. “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me.” John 14:10.

The Holy Spirit became the special emissary to man upon Christ's ascension. He also was not to communicate His own thoughts, words or opinions. “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: . . . He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” John 16:13–14.

How much more should mere mortals, as emissaries of Christ, be very careful to not communicate by example or word any personal thoughts or opinions that might be interpreted as being an expression of God's will! As ambassadors of Christ we must transmit faithfully only those messages that we have received from Him whom we represent:

We must obey the orders from above. *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 934.

Leaders are not to put confidence in themselves alone, but are to look constantly to Jesus as their Captain and Pilot:

I was shown that the follies of Israel in the days of Samuel will be repeated unless men have greater humility and less confidence in themselves, and greater confidence in the Lord God of Israel, the Ruler of His people. . . . One leak will sink the

mightiest vessel that ever rode the proud ocean; so will the church make shipwreck amid the perils of these last days unless the holy Captain of her salvation shall not only serve as Captain, but Pilot. We have a living Head, and every man in office where sacred responsibilities are involved must enquire at every step, "Is this the way of the Lord?" See Judges 2:22. He must look constantly and continuously to Jesus for His guidance, and maintain principle at any cost. It is not what finite men can do, but what God can do through finite men who are teachable, humble, unselfish, and sanctified. We cannot put the least confidence in human ability, unless the divine power co-operates with the human. When men make God their trust, it will be evidenced by meekness, by much prayer, by love, by Christian politeness and genuine courtesy to all people, and by great caution in their position and movements. They will reveal dependence upon God, and give evidence that they have a firm platform of solid, uncontaminated principle beneath their feet. These men will show that they have the mind of Christ.

There is altogether too much self-confidence and self-sufficiency, altogether too much pride of heart and self-esteem, without giving glory to God. God has given minds and talents to men only in trust, on trial, to test and prove them to see if they will work in His way and do His will, and put not confidence in themselves alone. *Ibid.*, 919–920.

Christ cannot be our Redeemer unless He is also our Ruler:

Let this point be fully settled in every mind: If we accept Christ as a Redeemer, we must accept Him as a Ruler. We cannot have the assurance and perfect confiding trust in Christ as our Saviour until we acknowledge Him as our King and are obedient to His commandments. Thus we evidence our allegiance to God. We have then the genuine ring in our faith, for it is a working faith. It works by love. *Ibid.*, 823.

The desire of each institution must be to be guided by God's unerring counsel:

This, oh, this is what is needed in the hearts of all our institutions! It is the knowledge of God; and men must not lift up themselves in their own finite wisdom, as did ancient Israel—take themselves out of the hands of God, and think in their human wisdom and supposed smartness they can do much better when left to their own imaginings. Thus thought the inhabitants of the world destroyed by a Flood. When they fully decided that they had no need of God, then the Lord decided He had no need of them, and they and all their wicked works