

THE MESSAGE for Nov 13, 2011

Romans 10:14-17

What Kind of Authority Does the Bible Hold?

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It is truly amazing when you think about it – how very little people know about the Bible, especially here in America where everyone has free access to the Word of God. Jay Leno, on the Tonight Show, often interviews people on the street. One night he asked some people questions about the Bible.

He asked two college-age women, “Can you name one of the Ten Commandments?” One woman replied, “Freedom of speech?”

Leno turned to the other women and said, “Complete this sentence: Let he who is without sin...” She responded, “Have a good time?”

Leno then stopped a young man and asked him, “Who, according to the Bible, was eaten by a whale?” The man answered confidently, “Pinocchio.”

These misunderstandings are humorous on the one hand and yet so very sad on the other. God’s Word ought to have more authority in our lives than that, don’t you think? Of course, the Bible doesn’t say it was a whale that swallowed Jonah; it says it was a big fish.

Question: what *kind* of authority does the Bible hold?

I’ve come to realize that for many people, both in the church and outside the church, the Bible doesn’t hold any authority in their lives. And that is sad indeed. For others, both in the church and outside the church, the Bible is *the* authority for their lives.

So -- what *kind* of authority does the Bible hold for you?

You and I are held by authority everyday. We cannot escape the power of authority at work in our lives. We’re tied to it. If it disappeared, we would cease to be. We need authority in our lives. The question is what *kind* of authority do we need? Truth is, we live with many kinds of authority.

First: Consider gravity: it’s not just a good idea, it’s necessary. Our natural world is held together by the authority of gravity. We live by the laws of gravity.

Second: Consider our society; it’s held together by authority too, and that authority shapes our behaviors with laws. For example: What’s the first thing we do when we drive by a police officer? We take our foot off the gas and *then* we look at our speedometer.

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Third: Consider our families; they too are held together by authority. What parent hasn't said to their son or daughter, "Because I said so!" when asked the "why" question for the umpteenth time? Or the response, "Because I am the parent, and parents get to make those decisions."

Fourth: Consider the authority we give our teachers and our coaches. We'll pay a lot of money to have someone tell us what to do, when we decide to increase our knowledge or improve our health. The self-help movement relies on the authority of such experts.

Fifth: Consider the doctor's office. We do things in the doctor's office that we wouldn't think of doing anywhere else. Why? Because of the authority that exists there.

Sixth: Consider our traditions; they too hold a certain authority in our lives. The seven words, "*we've always done it that way before*" holds a lot of authority in our lives especially in the church.

By the way those are the seven last words of a dead or dying church. You will never ever hear me say, *we've always done it that way before*. I don't want to be part of a dead or dying church. Do you?

I want to be part of life-giving, thriving church that makes God proud. Don't you? Besides that, Jesus never said those seven word either or anything like them. If anything, Jesus challenged the traditions of our religion since they got in the way of people living by the authority of God's Word. Let me say that again, Jesus challenged the traditions of our religion since they got in the way of people living by the authority of God's Word.

When it comes to the Bible, we can see all six types of authority on its pages.

* The Bible has the authority of the law with Moses and the Ten Commandments. Like gravity - the Ten Commandments are not just good ideas; they are the law. And our society couldn't exist without the gravity of laws.

* There is a certain parental authority in the Bible with story after story of God's children asking the "why" question and God pretty much says, "Because I said so." That's where that phrase comes from.

* The prophets in the Bible are like teachers or coaches or doctors who have the responsibility to help us learn, or to help us grow, or to help diagnose the sin in our lives. So we can do something about it. They have the authority to give orders and prescriptions to help us get and stay spiritually healthy.

So what kind of authority does the Bible hold for you?

We need a certain amount of authority in our lives. We need laws to keep us safe. We need loving parents who say “no” sometimes. We need a loving God who says “no” sometimes. We need teachers, coaches, and doctors to help us live faithfully and fully not in the rut of our religion but within the spunk of our spirituality.

So I invite you to consider a seventh kind of authority we find in the Bible. This authority trumps all of the other authorities. And that is the authority of... love. That’s the kind of authority that guided Jesus. That’s the kind of authority he expects will guide us too.

The Bible tells us that Jesus was different because he taught as one having authority. The religious teachers and leaders in Jesus’ day would quote other teachers and leaders but not Jesus. Jesus spoke from his own being. He spoke from the authority of love. Love guided his every thought, word, and deed. A love that reaches out to people... a love that forgives... a love that heals... a love that frees and accepts even the worst of sinners... a love that is unconditional... a love that breaks down the walls and barriers of any kinds... a love that builds up people...

Jesus lived and died by the authority of love. He poured out that love on a cross for you and for me and for all peoples. The cross is the ultimate reminder of the authority of love at work in our lives. The cross reminds us to love God and love one another (*make the sign of the cross*).

Jesus said to his disciples, including you and me, he said, “*all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me and I give it to you.*” Jesus has given us the authority of love.

Jesus has given *you* the authority of love. So let me ask you, what are you going to do with that authority this week? Might I suggest it be the guide for every say, think, and do in the church and outside the church... so that they will know we are Christians by our love. Amen.