

Authority

God wants us to live well and enjoy our life to the fullest so he has placed around us the protection of rules and authority. God is not power hungry nor is He simply demanding mindless obedience to show that He's in charge. God is a loving Father who knows what helps and what hurts us and who clearly communicates that information with us so we can live well. God knows our bent towards self-will and Satan's desire to lead us into destruction by encouraging us to do anything to harm our relationship with our Loving God. God, who made us and the world, sets out what rules work (just like gravity) and describes consequences that will come when we try to operate outside of these principles. These are often not punishments but simply natural consequences that God is helpfully describing for us.

Little children are too young to know enough to play and live safely. One of the most precious privileges we have as parents is to protect children from harm they don't even know exists, even when they scream and throw a temper tantrum because what we are protecting them from is something they are desperately seeking in the moment.

Similarly, we are in need of the loving rules God speaks into our lives because we are incapable of figuring things out on our own. We desperately need the limits and guides He gives to us. Often we will not understand why God is asking us to not do something that we really want to do and that seems harmless to us. We must be humble enough to realize that we just don't know enough. We have to trust God's loving heart towards us that He is not just depriving us of something nice to see if we will obey him. He's simply trying to keep us from harm. ***Then the Lord gave me this message, " ... can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.*** (Jeremiah 18:5-6 NLT)

All authority has to start somewhere and for Christians, that authority begins with the God who made us. God is very clear that the one in charge is God. He uses the picture of a potter and clay to help us understand that the creator has authority over the created. We are the created. God is in charge. When what we think or want is different from what God says, God gets the last word and we need to change.

King David had no question about this when he wrote: ***"God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to you"*** (Psalm 62:11). Later on another king of Israel who was in charge of thousands, knew that ultimately someone else was in charge and had the final word. He said, ***"O Lord, God of our ancestors, you alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you!"*** (2 Chronicles 20:6 NLT)

When Jesus' disciples asked him how to pray, Jesus gave them the essentials and in that prayer we find these words: ***"for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever."*** (Matthew 6:13 NIV) Every time we pray The Lord's Prayer we are

affirming that God is in charge and He has authority to make the rules we live by.

Most of us are well aware that God is in charge. The problem isn't knowing that, but surrendering to that when our will and desires cross with God's revealed will. The damage we did to ourselves, our families, and to others in the community when we disregarded authority is proof enough that we need to be under authority in order to live well and love well.

We all need to have a foundation upon which to stand, some place or person to whom we are accountable for how we live our days, and checks and balances around which to structure our lives together with other members of the community and the world at large. God has designated parents, government leaders, community authorities such as police and courts, church leaders, teachers or bosses to hold some measure of authority in our lives. He calls us to respect those who hold these offices and to submit to their directions. Our recovery is in serious jeopardy when we operate outside the counsel and regulations these people offer us. ***For the Lord's sake, accept all authority—the king as head of state, and the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish all who do wrong and to honor those who do right You younger men, accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, serve each other in humility, for God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble.*** (1 Peter 5:13-14, 5:5 NLT)

Do we get a "pass" if someone in our life abused us or others with their power and authority? Abuse of power is common in our world. There's no doubt about that. One of the ways people tend to cope with wrong and injustice is to simply throw out the broken system and do their own thing. While we may need to recall a politician from office or have an immoral judge stand down from his bench or put someone behind bars who defrauds others, we cannot do away with every system of rules and limits on human behaviour. Without an authority structure surrounding human beings we would tear each other apart. Fortunately for us, the authority that God wraps around our lives is loving and protective and seeking our best interests. God never abuses His power with us.

"O people, the Lord has already told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8 NLT) Are we willing to walk humbly with God? Are we willing to do what He tells us to do even when it is hard and we don't understand why? Are we willing to stop doing things He tells us are wrong, even if everyone else is doing them? Are we willing to wait when something isn't good for us right now?

God's authority, through His rules, cries out to us, "Recognize the love. Receive my protection. Let me care for you when you don't know how to care for yourself."

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Where do I see God's authority at work in my life?
2. When God's will and my desire conflict, what do my actions say about what I actually believe about His loving purposes behind the rules?