

Higher Authority – A Bible Study

Life Celebration Event

INTRODUCTION

If we lived under a totalitarian government, with a dictatorship control over all aspects of our life, there would be little question who the highest (human) authority in our nation was. Thank God we do not have that kind of political system! The government and culture we do have, however, means that there is often a lack of clarity regarding who has authority in one area or another, or competition among different people, voices, or forces to exert authority. This can easily lead to confusion and conflict.

Who claims authority in the following areas of our society, and what effect does competition for authority in those areas have on you as an individual and on the community at large?

- Health and medicine
- Education
- Business and commerce
- Truth
- Justice
- Marriage and family
- Religion and spirituality
- Sexual morality
- The value of life

THE COMPETITION

1. Read the following Bible passages and relate them to the conflict between God's authority and its challengers.

Daniel 3:1-18 — How does this account show someone setting up his own authority and god as superior to the Lord? How do believers today face similar challenges?

Mark 7:1-13 — How does this account illustrate the arrogance of presuming an “expertise” that makes one wiser than God and his Word? How do believers today face similar challenges?

2 Chronicles 18:1-27 — How does this account show what happens when false teachings and human priorities are placed up against the authority of God and his Word? How do believers today face similar challenges?

Exodus 32:1-6,19-24 — How does this account show someone giving into the wishes of the crowd and its pressure to exceed God’s authority? How do believers today face similar challenges?

1 Samuel 13:5-14 — How does this account show someone placing their need to solve a problem or relieve a difficult situation above the Lord’s authority? How do believers today face similar challenges?

Numbers 20:2-12 — How does this account show someone treating his feelings as having more authority than the Lord? How do believers today face similar challenges?

THE CREATOR RULES, THE CREATOR’S RULES

2. **Scan Job 39-41, Psalm 2, and Isaiah 40:9-31**, reading portions. What does the truth that God created and sustains the world — and everyone and everything in the universe — say about his authority over it (and us)?
3. What words might you use to characterize a person, group, or nation that chose to challenge the Lord’s authority and asserted that his, her, or their authority was as great or greater?
4. **Read Mark 1:21b-28**. What made and makes Christ’s teaching different?

What made and makes Christ’s authority different?

5. What the demon (unclean spirit) said about Jesus’s identity was absolutely correct; even his fear that Christ came to destroy was a correct fear, since the Son of God has that power. What was the demon, speaking through the man, trying to do with Jesus’ authority?

6. **Read John 10:14-18.** Jesus had divine authority not just to teach undeniable truth and command unwilling evil spirits, but also to do something even more important. What else did he use that authority for?
7. Why does it make a difference that Christ's suffering and death came by his own divine authority, and not by accident, evil, or mere circumstance?
8. **Read Matthew 28:18-20.** If it hadn't been clear to his disciples before, it should have been clear to them after his resurrection: What kind of authority, as the Christ and Son of the living God, did Jesus have?

How did and does Jesus put that authority to work for the world's benefit?

9. **Read Ephesians 1:17-23.** How is Christ's authority particularly important to his people on earth, the Church?
10. A friend tells you this: "Yeah, sure, OK, Jesus is in charge of Christians, and looks out for the Church. That only makes sense, since it's his thing. But it's going too far to presume that his authority goes anywhere beyond that. People who don't want to be Christians don't owe anything to Jesus, and you have no business saying that what he wants should matter to anyone outside the Church." How might you respond?
11. **Read Philippians 2:9-11** and **Revelation 1:7,8.** What do we know will eventually happen with those who resist or deny Christ's authority here on earth?

GOD'S WORD HAS GOD'S AUTHORITY

12. **Read Luke 6:46-49.** What will those who profess to follow Christ do with the things he says, which we have written for us in the Bible?
13. In John 1, Jesus is identified as "the Word," making clear that all that the Lord has said, in both the Old and the New Testaments, is written for us with all of Christ's divine power and authority, so all the Bible is his teaching, not just the quotations we find in the four Gospels. **Read Hebrews 4:12,13.** Does the power and authority of the Scriptures apply only to Christians? Explain.

14. **Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17.** Why are we as Christians going to particularly respect and treasure the authority of the Word over every aspect of our lives?
15. A family member says to you, “Sure, the Bible is important — that’s where we learn what God has to say about love and stuff like that. I like learning about Jesus. But something written in the Bible centuries ago doesn’t necessarily still apply to us or our world today; just because the Bible says something doesn’t mean it’s right or that we need to follow it.” How might you respond?

GOD HAS SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT LIFE

16. Some people — even some who say they accept all of Scripture as God’s authoritative Word — make the argument that since words like “abortion” and “euthanasia” don’t appear in the Bible, the Bible doesn’t have anything to say about it. Furthermore, they argue that since the most fundamental command Christ gave us is to love our neighbor, the Christian approach to life issues is going to focus on being compassionate to people who are struggling with such things, and not judging them for the choices they make.

How do the following passages make clear that the Bible does indeed address the full range of “life issues,” and that choices to do things like aborting a child, euthanizing the suffering, asking for assisted suicide, and treating embryonic lives as mere property or subjecting them to experimentation are in fact against God’s will and authority, and should be condemned as sin?

- **Genesis 9:5-7**

- **Psalm 31:15**

- **Exodus 20:13**

- **Psalm 51:5**

- **Psalm 139:13-16**

- **Luke 1:39-44**

- **Matthew 10:29-31**

- **Proverbs 31:8,9**

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT LIFE MEANS SOMETHING FOR OUR LIVES

17. In arguing for a right to abortion, but also in regard to things like claiming “autonomy” to end one’s own life, people today will say things like, “I can do what I want with my body” or “What anybody does with his or her own body is nobody’s business but his or her own!” **Read 1 Corinthians 6:19,20.** What does this passage say in regard to such arguments, especially for Christians?

18. When you are watching the news one night, a pro-abortion protester is interviewed and says, “I don’t have a problem with Christians. In fact, I follow Jesus myself. But I have a problem when people who call themselves Christians presume to tell other people that they are wrong to do things they have every right to do, like choose abortion. They should just leave those questions of right and wrong to Jesus and quit pretending they know better than everybody else.” **Read Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1,17-20,** and refer again to **Matthew 28:18-20.** Explain why Christians today do indeed have the authority to identify right and wrong in society, and where that authority comes from.

19. Jesus gave his apostles authority over evil spirits when he sent them into the world as his representatives. While he has not charged Christians today with casting evil rulers out of office or throwing abortion clinics into the sea, he has still given us the same kind of authority over evil, because we speak and teach his Word. What are ways — perhaps not so spectacular, but still real and significant — that we as believers in our society can work to “cast out evil” and “trample on snakes and scorpions”?

How does having Christ’s authority give us confidence in doing these things?

20. How does **John 14:15-24** help us answer the charge that those today who truly follow Christ will not judge anyone’s behavior as wrong or presume to tell others what is right, but will instead be “compassionate” and accept people’s choices, whatever they might be?

21. **Read John 5:22-27.** What warning is there for those who wish to enjoy Christ’s love and salvation but reject his authority over people’s lives and bodies?

22. **Read Romans 13:1-5.** What is the relationship between God’s authority and the state’s?

23. Governments are made up of sinful human beings, so certainly they will make mistakes and do things contrary to God’s will. **Read Acts 5:29.** What should Christians do when the government or its agents command us to do or accept things that are clearly against the Lord’s commands?

24. Many people today, some Christians included, encourage us to look at the issue of abortion and simply accept that the matter is settled. “The law is clear, the Court has ruled, and the government has made its policies, there’s no going back. It’s tragic, but you (we) lost, and it’s long past time to move on to areas where you (we) can actually make a difference now.” How does the knowledge that we have a Higher Authority who guides our actions, speech, and attitudes help us in dealing with “encouragements” like this or any sense of defeat where life issues are concerned?

How does this same knowledge that we have a Higher Authority in Christ and his Word help us to instead be confident of victory when competing “authorities” suggest or even command that we make choices or support policies that take, misuse, or devalue human life?

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LEADER'S GUIDE

NOTE FOR LEADER: *This lesson can probably fill one and a half to two hours of study, particularly if you have a group that wishes to discuss issues in depth. If you prefer to finish the lesson in an hour or less, you are encouraged to identify ahead of time which questions, passages, etc. you wish to skip or spend less time on, which passages to read aloud, etc., in order to still complete the study in the time you have allotted. Feel free to edit and/or reformat the study to suit your situation.*

INTRODUCTION

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Who claims authority in the following areas of our society, and what effect does competition for authority in those areas have on you as an individual and on the community at large?

The point here is to help people recognize the conflict in terms they might not be used to; if you are aiming for this to be a one hour study only, be careful not to spend too much time on this (it's just an introduction) or go too far off onto tangents — try to keep discussion to identifying the various “authorities” and briefly outlining the consequences of competition. It's not necessary to discuss each area (but obviously don't skip the last one!).

- Health and medicine

Government agencies at different levels set standards, make recommendations, and issue regulations — and they are not always in agreement; but medical societies, industry associations, and such also issue “expert” guidance, and there is no end of “competition” from people with ideas, services, or products to sell, “old wives’ tales”, things promoted on social media, and people claiming “the establishment” has things all wrong (with varying levels of actual knowledge and expertise). (Cf. the response to Covid-19, vaccination policies, how to treat a cold) The effect of this competition goes from mild frustration and confusion to outright danger, if a particular “authority” happens to give the wrong guidance.

- Education

In most public school systems, there is the government (superintendent, school board), the teachers’ union, and the parents/voters, often having very different ideas about what policies should be followed. Add in education researchers who always seem to be “discovering” that the system needs to be turned upside down so something new and better can be put in place, politicians seeking to score points, and publishers and testing

companies out to make a profit and it can be very confusing for both parents and students. Sadly, this can have very negative consequences on children's educations.

- **Business and commerce**
Whenever there is a crisis, or an election, there's no shortage of authorities proclaiming what is best for business and the economy: politicians, government agencies, business associations, big corporations, professors of economics, TV pundits, etc. And even when times are relatively calm, one broker will advise one thing, while another will advise the opposite. In many or most cases, the effect of all this "churn" won't be severe, but in some, if the wrong guidance is followed, financial ruin can result — for individuals, companies, and/or the economy.
- **Truth**
There is always competition when it comes to truth: philosophers, theologians, educators, and such argue on an intellectual or academic level (some even claim that there is no such thing as truth); politicians, economists, and pundits argue on current events and policies; husbands and wives argue about whose version of the conversation they had last week is the true one.
- **Justice**
We'd like to think that the decision of a judge or jury is all the authority anyone needs to see justice done, but if that were the case we would not have appeals courts and split decisions or hung juries; political movements and activists of all sorts obviously also claim authority to define what is just and what is not. No one wants confusion about justice, especially when it affects them personally, but the more different voices and influences there are, disagreeing, the harder it is for us to be certain that justice is done or even recognized.
- **Marriage and family**
There once was a time in our society when there were really only two authorities in this area — the church and the state — and they basically agreed about what was good and should be done. Now churches do not speak in unison, and countless opinions get put forth as policies by government at different levels. It's all too easy to see how no-fault divorce, the redefinition of marriage, deliberate single-parenting, and more have damaged the institution of marriage, weakened families, and hurt children.
- **Religion and spirituality**
Today, it's no longer just a competition among Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, etc., or even among Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists, but every individual is seen as his or her own authority, fully able and right to decide for him- or herself. Besides the obvious confusion and loss of certainty this results in, there's the much more serious consequence: those who don't follow Jesus end up unsaved, out of heaven, and in hell.

- **Sexual morality**
Again, it used to be that all of society's authorities were basically on the same side when it came to sexual morality — church, state, school, family, etc. Now they not only speak with many different voices and make many different claims, we also have celebrities, the entertainment media, the academy, etc. all promoting standards of morality — or denying it entirely — that openly and seriously conflict with what Scripture and the Church teach. Sadly, we see every sort of sexual immorality on display not only in our society, but even among Christians, as people's sinful nature takes advantage of the situation and chooses the "authority" it most prefers over the ones that speak for God.
- **The value of life**
The church should speak with one voice on life, in accordance with Scripture's clear teachings, but today there are many denominations, professors, pastors, etc. who accept or even promote abortion, euthanasia, and such — all claiming God's authority in doing so. Courts, legislatures, governors, presidents, government agencies, etc. also claim and exercise authority, officially or unofficially making statements about whose lives are worth living, supporting, protecting — and whose are not. Various movements, activists, organizations, industries, and people in media also, of course, claim the authority to tell us whose lives have value.

THE COMPETITION

1. Read the following Bible passages and relate them to the conflict between God's authority and its challengers.

NOTE: The leader may wish to divide the class into break-out groups or tables and assign them each one or more passages to discuss and then report back to the class as a whole.

Daniel 3:1-18 — How does this account show someone setting up his own authority and god as superior to the Lord? How do believers today face similar challenges?

King Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that he was great and powerful enough to command the worship of the god of his choosing — and to punish anyone who dared to worship the Lord instead; God set him straight, through the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Believers in our society are not likely commanded to bow down to any idols, but many experience heavy pressure to "go along" with policies of their governments, employers, schools, families, or peers to submit to or go along with practices and positions that are against their consciences or directly against God and his will. (Cf. "cancel culture")

Mark 7:1-13 — How does this account illustrate the arrogance of presuming an "expertise" that makes one wiser than God and his Word? How do believers today face similar challenges?

The Pharisees and the "experts" expected everyone to follow their rules because of their expertise, regardless of whether or not the Word supported those rules; they went so far as to presume their new rules could exempt them from what God had clearly proclaimed in

his Word. Christians today still have to deal with all sorts of legalism, as we are told by “experts” of various sorts that we need to do certain things, hold certain opinions, etc. if we want God’s favor. There are many modern-day Pharisees who elevate their ideas of what is good and proper over what God actually says in his Word.

2 Chronicles 18:1-27 — How does this account show what happens when false teachings and human priorities are placed up against the authority of God and his Word? How do believers today face similar challenges?

The false prophets clearly considered themselves in competition with the Lord’s true prophet, Micaiah, but he wouldn’t “play” — he simply declared God’s Word and let its authority stand; of course, what he said was true, and the consequences were severe for those who preferred the presumed authority of the false prophets. It remains a huge problem for Christians and the Church that people turn away from God’s Word and truth and instead satisfy their “itching ears” with false teachings.

Exodus 32:1-6,19-24 — How does this account show someone giving into the wishes of the crowd and its pressure to reject God’s authority? How do believers today face similar challenges?

Aaron knew what was right, but did what was wrong — really, really wrong — because he failed to trust the Lord and let fear of the crowd (peer pressure) control him (note how ridiculously flimsy his excuse is). Believers today in all sorts of situations face peer pressure and fear what might happen to them if they don’t go along with the crowd — the teenager pressured to do drugs or have sex, the worker threatened with firing if he doesn’t do something unethical, the public figure threatened with “cancellation” if he takes a stand for truth or shares his faith, etc.

1 Samuel 13:5-14 — How does this account show someone placing their need to solve a problem or relieve a difficult situation above the Lord’s authority? How do believers today face similar challenges?

Saul gave his problem an authority greater than the Lord’s — he pretended that it was more important to relieve the difficulty of his situation than to obey the command he’d been given. Christians too frequently today, too, act as though a difficult situation gives them license to ignore what God has said, e.g. the unmarried woman who goes ahead with an abortion because she sees it as the only way out, the executive who embezzles from his company because he’s about to lose his house, etc.

Numbers 20:2-12 — How does this account show someone treating his feelings as having more authority than the Lord? How do believers today face similar challenges?

Moses let his anger control him when making his decisions, though he knew that was contrary to what the Lord had told him to do (and because he dishonored God through that, he was punished). Many believers let their decisions and actions be guided by what

they feel — love, anger, compassion, pain, etc. — instead of by what the Lord says in the Bible.

THE CREATOR RULES, THE CREATOR'S RULES

2. **Scan Job 39-41, Psalm 2, and Isaiah 40:9-31**, reading portions. What does the truth that God created and sustains the world — and everyone and everything in the universe — say about his authority over it (and us)?

[These readings could also be discussed in break-out groups.] These are long readings, so give the class a few minutes to skim over them (rather than read them out loud); it shouldn't be too hard for them to get the gist after "sampling" some of the verses in each.

It may seem obvious to us, but it is clearly not obvious enough that God has to make the point, in great detail, numerous times, even to his own people: Since he is the Creator and Sustainer of all, everything belongs to him, everything is under his control, and everyone — even kings and princes — owes him honor and obedience. This certainly applies to every person, not just those who choose to worship the Lord.

3. What words might you use to characterize a person, group, or nation that chose to challenge the Lord's authority and asserted that his, her, or their authority was as great or greater?

Foolish. "Cruisin' for a bruisin'". Unwise and uninformed. Damned. Rebellious. Reckless. Etc.

4. **Read Mark 1:21b-28**. What made and makes Christ's teaching different?

Rather than offering a series of options and opinions when interpreting the Scriptures and expressing God's will, Jesus taught as one with authority — who could actually say: This is true. This is what the Lord says. This is right, and that is wrong.

What made and makes Christ's authority different?

He was actually God; this was his own Word he was teaching. No one knew it better, and sin and error would never enter into his interpretation.

5. What the demon (unclean spirit) said about Jesus's identity was absolutely correct; even his fear that Christ came to destroy was a correct fear, since the Son of God has that power. What was the demon, speaking through the man, trying to do with Jesus' authority?

He wanted to discredit it and to make it look like the power Jesus was using would be used to destroy rather than to help or to heal. Jesus told him to be quiet because he did not want or need the endorsement of demons to establish his identity with the people — nor was it time yet for him to be fully revealed for Who he was.

6. **Read John 10:14-18.** Jesus had divine authority not just to teach undeniable truth and command unwilling evil spirits, but also to do something even more important. What else did he use that authority for?

He laid down his life for the sheep, that is, for sinners — and took it up again. He submitted himself to his enemies to suffer and die on the cross, and later he exercised his authority over life and rose again, all to save us and gain us eternal life in heaven.

7. Why does it make a difference that Christ's suffering and death came by his own divine authority, and not by accident, evil, or mere circumstance?

If Jesus were simply a victim, his suffering and death would not have been a sacrifice, just a tragedy. Instead we know that it was all part of God's gracious plan for our salvation, and that he willingly endured it all for our sake, so that all of God's power would be behind this work and achieve what he had set out to do.

8. **Read Matthew 28:18-20.** If it hadn't been clear to his disciples before, it should have been clear to them after his resurrection: What kind of authority, as the Christ and Son of the living God, did Jesus have?

Full, absolute, comprehensive, divine authority, without any limits.

How did and does Jesus put that authority to work for the world's benefit?

He commissions his servants, in the Church, to carry the gospel to all the earth and make disciples, so that all might be saved.

9. **Read Ephesians 1:17-23.** How is Christ's authority particularly important to his people on earth, the Church?

Jesus has been made head over everything for the church. That means everything that happens works for our eternal good (Romans 8:28) and for the advance of the mission he has given us.

10. A friend tells you this: "Yeah, sure, OK, Jesus is in charge of Christians, and looks out for the Church. That only makes sense, since it's his thing. But it's going too far to presume that his authority goes anywhere beyond that. People who don't want to be Christians don't owe anything to Jesus, and you have no business saying that what he wants should matter to anyone outside the Church." How might you respond?

Many people certainly like to think this way, but just because he rules for the Church doesn't mean Christ rules only the Church. He has clearly been placed over all things and all people and powers; nothing is not under his authority.

11. **Read Philippians 2:9-11** and **Revelation 1:7,8**. What do we know will eventually happen with those who resist or deny Christ's authority here on earth?

They will see and be compelled to acknowledge at the end that they were wrong, and that Jesus is indeed Lord and Head over all things and people. Sadly, it will be too late for this understanding to do them any good.

GOD'S WORD HAS GOD'S AUTHORITY

12. **Read Luke 6:46-49**. What will those who profess to follow Christ do with the things he says, which we have written for us in the Bible?

They will listen to and do them — put them into practice, and in so doing build their lives on a solid foundation of truth and power.

13. In John 1, Jesus is identified as “the Word,” making clear that all that the Lord has said, in both the Old and the New Testaments, is written for us with all of Christ's divine power and authority, so all the Bible is his teaching, not just the quotations we find in the four Gospels. **Read Hebrews 4:12,13**. Does the power and authority of the Scriptures apply only to Christians? Explain.

The exposing power and penetrating authority of the Word of God applies to every heart and soul, not just those of believers. Every person is known to the Lord, and everyone will have to give an account of themselves, and the Word is the standard.

14. **Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17**. Why are we as Christians going to particularly respect and treasure the authority of the Word over every aspect of our lives?

Most importantly, because the Scriptures make us wise to salvation — the Gospel is God's means to take away our sins and give us eternal life. But, having been saved, we rejoice to know that the Scriptures also provide us everything we need to live the lives that bring delight to God and blessings to us and our neighbors.

15. A family member says to you, “Sure, the Bible is important — that's where we learn what God has to say about love and stuff like that. I like learning about Jesus. But something written in the Bible centuries ago doesn't necessarily still apply to us or our world today; just because the Bible says something doesn't mean it's right or that we need to follow it.” How might you respond?

Such ideas are common, even among many who profess to be Christians, but this is setting oneself up as an authority in competition to and conflict with God, by presuming to judge what in his Word is true or applicable or not. It might be helpful to note that there is absolutely nothing in the Bible itself that suggests it will ever become outdated or have its usefulness expire — quite the opposite. “The Word of the Lord endures forever.”

GOD HAS SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT LIFE

16. Some people — even some who say they accept all of Scripture as God’s authoritative Word — make the argument that since words like “abortion” and “euthanasia” don’t appear in the Bible, the Bible doesn’t have anything to say about it. Furthermore, they argue that since the most fundamental command Christ gave us is to love our neighbor, the Christian approach to life issues is going to focus on being compassionate to people who are struggling with such things, and not judging them for the choices they make.

How do the following passages make clear that the Bible does indeed address the full range of “life issues,” and that choices to do things like aborting a child, euthanizing the suffering, asking for assisted suicide, and treating embryonic lives as mere property or subjecting them to experimentation are in fact against God’s will and authority, and should be condemned as sin?

NOTE: The leader may wish to divide the class into break-out groups or tables and assign them each one or more passages to discuss and then report back to the class as a whole.

- **Genesis 9:5-7**

God clearly states that no person has the authority to take another person’s life (unless acting to punish the murderer; this is the state acting as God’s representative); man is special, having been made in God’s image. Instead of taking life, God’s people are to be all about bringing forth life — human life — increasing and being fruitful and filling the earth.

- **Psalm 31:15**

No human has authority when it comes to the beginning or the end of life; all our times are in God’s hands. He decides who lives and dies, not us — not even with our own lives.

- **Exodus 20:13**

Lest there be any doubt, God condemns murder in all forms.

- **Psalm 51:5**

David affirms that his state of sinfulness began not in childhood nor even at birth, but at the time he came into being in the womb. (This is problematic for Christians who want to consider abortion not such a big deal, because even if it takes a life, it’s an innocent one and must go to heaven. Even unborn children need salvation, and how will that happen if they can never even be baptized or hear the gospel?)

- **Psalm 139:13-16**

The psalmist affirms that his “personhood” began in the womb, long before his birth — and that God was intimately interested and involved in forming him there. The Lord has that same interest and involvement with every unborn child — each is anything but a “clump of cells.”

- **Luke 1:39-44**

The unborn John the Baptist was spiritually active and aware in his mother’s womb, and recognized the presence of his Lord, unborn, in Mary’s womb. Even if we take this event as exceptional, it shows that the unborn are real persons, independent of their mothers, with their own spirits and identities.

- **Matthew 10:29-31**

Our Father in heaven is interested in and cares for even the seemingly most insignificant people, ones that could be ignored or overlooked like a sparrow. No one can claim God doesn’t notice or care what happens to them — or to their unborn child, their grandma with dementia, their husband in a coma, etc.

- **Proverbs 31:8,9**

God does not want us to ignore the plight of the weak, vulnerable, or defenseless, and certainly not to oppress them further (or take their lives!), but rather to speak up for, defend, and protect them. (Cf. Commandment 5, Small Catechism.)

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT LIFE MEANS SOMETHING FOR OUR LIVES

17. In arguing for a right to abortion, but also in regard to things like claiming “autonomy” to end one’s own life, people today will say things like, “I can do what I want with my body” or “What anybody does with his or her own body is nobody’s business but his or her own!” **Read 1 Corinthians 6:19,20.** What does this passage say in regard to such arguments, especially for Christians?

We don’t actually own our bodies, and thus don’t have the “right” to do whatever we want with them. Christ bought and paid for us with his blood on the cross — as Christians we take that very seriously. (We’re used to the “pro-choice” insistence that abortion is just something women are doing with their own bodies, and typically we answer by pointing out there’s another life and body involved — the baby’s. But with Christian women it might be worth pointing out that there’s another fundamental problem with the premise: she doesn’t actually have the right to do what she wants with her body in the first place.) We are stewards over life and our bodies as God’s created and redeemed blessing for us.

18. When you are watching the news one night, a pro-abortion protester is interviewed and says, “I don’t have a problem with Christians. In fact, I follow Jesus myself. But I have a problem when people who call themselves Christians presume to tell other people that they are wrong to do things they have every right to do, like choose abortion. They should just leave those questions of right and wrong to Jesus and quit pretending they know better than everybody else.” **Read Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1,17-20**, and refer again to **Matthew 28:18-20**. Explain why Christians today do indeed have the authority to identify right and wrong in society, and where that authority comes from.

When Jesus commissioned his servants to go out and preach in his name, he gave them his own authority — the authority of the Word of God, which is living and active, judges thoughts, words, and lives, etc. So, Christians not only have “business” talking about what’s right and wrong, they have been commissioned to do so. Those who have a problem with Christians teaching what God says about things actually have a problem not with Christians but with Christ himself.

19. Jesus gave his apostles authority over evil spirits when he sent them into the world as his representatives. While he has not charged Christians today with casting evil rulers out of office or throwing abortion clinics into the sea, he has still given us the same kind of authority over evil, because we speak and teach his Word. What are ways — perhaps not so spectacular, but still real and significant — that we as believers in our society can work to “cast out evil” and “trample on snakes and scorpions”?

Answers will vary. The leader will want to be careful to lead away from things that are strictly actions in the kingdom of the world, e.g. political organizing. Rather, focus on the actions we as Christian citizens can do that are appropriate. Most fundamental is probably teaching the truth about things, especially life issues and matters of morality and such, to our children, our families and to everyone in the church — we fight evil most by preventing it from taking hold in the first place. We both proclaim the truth and model the truth in our words and actions. But beyond that we also use Scripture’s authority when we take stands for life and marriage, offering correction to erring Christians, exercising Christian judgment in raising our children, etc.

How does having Christ’s authority give us confidence in doing these things?

We’re not just expressing our own opinions just like everybody else, or trying to “force” our ideas on others; we are serving as God’s own messengers, sharing his Word and wisdom, and we know it is always 100% correct.

20. How does **John 14:15-24** help us answer the charge that those today who truly follow Christ will not judge anyone's behavior as wrong or presume to tell others what is right, but will instead be "compassionate" and accept people's choices, whatever they might be?

True love for Christ means that we will hold onto his Word and commands, not let go of them when we think the situation calls for a different approach. Love for God comes before love for another, but love for God also enables and informs our love for others. "Compassion" that accepts godless choices — like abortion, suicide, etc. — is not actually loving, neither to Christ nor the neighbor.

21. **Read John 5:22-27**. What warning is there for those who wish to enjoy Christ's love and salvation but reject his authority over people's lives and bodies?

Such people will come under Christ's judgment, and not receive eternal life.

22. **Read Romans 13:1-5**. What is the relationship between God's authority and the state's?

Those who govern are God's representatives. They have his authority to punish the wrong and reward the right, including even at the point of a sword (lethal force, capital punishment, etc.)

23. Governments are made up of sinful human beings, so certainly they will make mistakes and do things contrary to God's will. **Read Acts 5:29**. What should Christians do when the government or its agents command us to do or accept things that are clearly against the Lord's commands?

Where there is such conflict, we obey God rather than man.

24. Many people today, some Christians included, encourage us to look at the issue of abortion and simply accept that the matter is settled. "The law is clear, the Court has ruled, and the government has made its policies, there's no going back. It's tragic, but you (we) lost, and it's long past time to move on to areas where you (we) can actually make a difference now." How does the knowledge that we have a Higher Authority who guides our actions, speech, and attitudes help us in dealing with "encouragements" like this or any sense of defeat where life issues are concerned?

Nothing is "settled" unless God says so, and since abortion is against his will, it will never really be "settled." We can keep praying, working, speaking, voting, etc., as Christians and as citizens, to try to correct this injustice which is also an offense against God's creation, and know that we have the world's Lord and Savior with us all the way.

How does this same knowledge that we have a Higher Authority in Christ and his Word help us to instead be confident of victory when competing “authorities” suggest or even command that we make choices or support policies that take, misuse, or devalue human life?

Jesus will always win, and since he’s on our side, when we stand with him we know that the victory is ours, too, whether it’s this year on one issue, or not until Judgment Day on another issue. There is no better place to stand than with Jesus, and since he is clearly on the side of life, we will be, too. Anyone who stands against, or even attacks us on these issues is not facing off just against another human being, but against the Head over all and Judge of all — we’re in a much better position than they!

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