

Authority in Worship

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Introduction

It has been said that authority rarely survives in the face of doubt, so it has reason to fear the skeptic. This could be true on a number of levels. Rebellion against authority stems from a skeptical attitude about both the need for it and the source of it. When enough people voice such skepticism, change – not necessarily for the good – is sure to occur. The most obvious example of this is in the realm of government. History is filled with rebellions (justified or not) and revolutions because people had enough of what they perceived as bad authority. “Protestation against authority is really against authority which is not authority in its own right, or authority which has become officious or excessive” (Ramm 16).

Of greater interest here is how authority relates to religion. What is presented here should sound familiar. Recognizing the need for authority from God is vital to serving and worshipping Him properly. While it may be tempting to think this is “old,” it is necessary for every generation to confront the issue. One generation’s knowledge does not guarantee knowledge for the next.

It is not uncommon to hear skepticism about authority as it pertains to what people (or churches) do and how they do it. Sometimes the skepticism is not just about seeking answers as to why certain things are done or avoided; it is about reconfiguring the whole concept of what it means to serve and worship God. This is neither nothing new nor isolated, as questions involving authority hit hard upon everyone who claims faith in God. Fundamentalist J. I. Packer observed: “The problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church ever faces. This is because Christianity is built on truth: that is to say, on the content of a divine revelation” (42). He further argues the importance of having “the right criterion of truth, by which we may tell the word of God from human error.... We must expect to find error constantly assailing the

truth; Christendom will always be a theological battlefield” (43). He argues that the “deepest cleavages in Christendom are doctrinal; and the deepest doctrinal cleavages are those which result from disagreement about authority. Radical divergences are only to be expected when there is no agreement as to the proper grounds for believing anything” (44). When people differ over the interpretation and content of divine revelation, they will necessarily differ over authority.

Thus the subject of authority is 1) fundamental, 2) at the core of recognizing truth from error, and 3) a point of continual contention. It is fundamental because it is a most basic recognition of the place of God in our service to Him. It is at the core of recognizing truth from error because the source of authority is grounded upon divine revelation, which is the standard of what is true and right. It is a point of continual contention because there continues to remain skeptical attitudes about the need and source of authority. Not a few divisions have occurred over issues related to authority. To speak about instrumental music in worship, congregational support of human institutions, church-sponsored social activities, or activities involved in worshipping God, is necessarily to address the question of authority. Yet all of these are issues, along with many more, which have divided people for many years because of differences regarding authority (see, e.g., *The Arlington Meeting* for a discussion of many such issues).

This paper rests upon dual foundational pillars regarding the nature of God and mankind:

1. God is the Creator, and as such He has the inherent right to tell us what to do, how to live, how to act, how to speak, how to dress, and how to worship Him. The nature of God requires us to recognize His inherent authority. Since God is the object of our worship, and since He has revealed Himself to mankind through an objective revelation of truth, it is our obligation to recognize Him as the source of this truth and submit to His authority. The first chapter of the

Bible puts this in proper perspective. He is the Creator (Gen. 1:1); we are the creatures made in His image and accountable to Him.

2. Humankind is incapable of providing an adequate source of authority from within. The nature of man demands that we acknowledge a greater source of authority. Every attempt mankind makes at establishing a self-made system of authority fails. This is especially so in religious matters. No commitment to human authority will save or unite. It is necessary for mankind to submit to the authority of God in all matters. As will be considered later, this is especially the case when it comes to worshipping Him. The first eleven chapters of Genesis tell us how miserably mankind fails when attempting to establish a way apart from God. From Adam and Eve's rebellion in the garden, Cain's murder of Abel, the flood of Noah's time, and the building of the tower at Babel, we learn great lessons about how inadequate people are at establishing their own authority. Without God's authority and our submission to it, there is only failure. Sin is, in fact, all about the rejection of the authority of God.

On Authority Defined

Generally, authority is the power to enforce laws, exact obedience, command, determine, or judge. It involves one who is invested with this power, especially a government or government officials. It is "Power (delegated), authority to do anything; permission, license" (Bullinger). Consider also the following definitions from Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich:

1. Freedom of choice, right to act, decide, or dispose of one's property as one wishes.
2. Ability to do something, capability, might, power.
3. Authority, absolute power, warrant.
4. The power exercised by rulers or others in high position by virtue of their office.

From Louw and Nida:

1. The right to judge on the basis of having the potential to evaluate — ‘right, freedom of choice, freedom of action, power to evaluate’ (30.122).
2. A state of control over someone or something — ‘control’ (37.13).
3. The right to control or govern over — ‘authority to rule, right to control’ (37.35).
4. The domain or sphere over which one has authority to control or rule — ‘jurisdiction’ (37.36).
5. One who has the authority to rule or govern — ‘an authority, ruler’ (37.38).

Thus the concept of authority has at least two sides:

First, one in a position of authority has the right to command and to expect obedience from those over whom he rules. This is the authority one has based upon the position he occupies. A king occupies a position of authority and, based upon that position, has the right to command and expect obedience from his subjects. God occupies the ultimate position of authority because He is the Creator of the heavens and earth (Gen. 1:1). Paul’s argument in Acts 17 makes this point well. In contrast to the pagan gods, whose existence depended upon the people who created them, the God of heaven and earth is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything, “since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things” (vs. 25). Because He is Creator, and because He gives us life, and because He determines the boundaries of man, He has the right to command the repentance of vv. 30-31. Clearly, God does not need us for His survival; we need Him. The only way we can gain the ultimate benefits of living under His rule is by submitting ourselves to His authority. We have free will to refuse to submit, of course, but not without bearing the ill consequences of such a decision. Without adverse consequences attached to the rejection of God’s authority, His authority would become meaningless (i.e., no punishment for crimes committed). God’s nature requires accountability to His will.

Second, one on the receiving end of authority is in submission to the one who is in the position of an authority. Delegated authority is the power given to others to act. It is the permission and license granted to one to do something from the one who has the power to give it. This is generally understood as permission. When we say that we have authority to do something, we are saying that we have the permission (or even stronger, the command, depending on what it is) from God to do it. How that permission is discerned is itself a point of contention at times, but from a basic starting point we should always understand that God is the ultimate source of authority and we need to be looking to Him as the One who determines the boundaries of permission. When we can safely know that God has authorized an action, then we can confidently say that we have the authority to do it. If we cannot be sure of such authority, then we are acting presumptuously to move ahead without proper permission (e.g., the new cart incident, 2 Sam. 6; 1 Chron. 13).

On the Foundation for Authority

Because of who God is, the foundation for any discussion of authority rests solidly upon Him and His nature (cf. Psalm 89:5-18; 113:5; Dan. 4:34-37; Rom. 9:21). We must include here that Jesus Christ is in this foundation also because He Himself is God (John 1:1, 14). He has all authority and reigns as King and Head over all (Matt. 28:18; Acts 2:30-36; Col. 1:15-18). Because of His position and the authority He maintains, His word is the final standard and judge (John 12:48). Further, Jesus delegated authority to the apostles and prophets of the first century to deliver all truth (John 16:13). We now have the entire Bible as the final product and source for our authority.

The Bible itself then, as the revealed word of God, is vital to our understanding of authority. It is the inspired word of God, and therefore carries with it the same force as the

verbally spoken word of God (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Because of this, the Bible is an objective standard to which we must submit. “Objective” means “uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices.” To have a subjective hermeneutic would mean that we interpret Scriptures the way our emotions dictate; but this would be ignoring the authority of God in favor of the authority of man. In this postmodern world, we may be tempted to think that all people can have their own truth and their own interpretation without being challenged. However, as Ramm observed, “There are not as many authorities as there are individuals, and there are not as many religious truths as there are religious thinkers. There is only one authority – God; and only one truth – divine revelation” (21). If some want to engage in certain activities, then they will find a way to justify themselves by misinterpreting Scriptures. However, since the Scriptures are objective (outside of ourselves), we need to let God tell us what He wants. Our job, then, is to understand exactly what it is that God has revealed to us. This is one reason why proper biblical interpretation is so crucial to our service toward God. Misapplying the word of God will result in a failure to follow God’s authority (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16-17).

On the Need for Authority

Do we really need authority (permission from God) in all that we do in our service toward Him? Some may think not, but once the negative position is taken, it traps the person in a nebulous, subjective thought-process of being more concerned about what mankind thinks rather than what God thinks. If our goal is to please God, then we cannot afford to deny the need for authority from Him. The question then is, to borrow from Paul, “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). That which pleases God (or displeases Him) is what the subject of authority is all about. If we make it our aim to please Him in all things (cf. 2 Cor.

5:9), then we are necessarily making it our goal to follow His authority in all things. These ideas cannot be separated. If we decide to act without God's authority, then we are deciding against trying to serve and please Him in favor of pleasing ourselves.

This need for authority is seen in every area of life. Without authority in government, anarchy will result. Without authority on the job, there would no order or organization, and very little accomplished. Without authority in school, adequate learning could not take place. Without authority in the home, confusion will result and families will suffer. Perhaps one of the reasons why all of these areas mentioned have so many problems today is because of a lack of respect for proper authority. Ideally, people understand that there is a need for authority of some kind. Rejection of all authority leads to utter chaos.

Still, when it comes to religious matters, many throw the concept of authority out, preferring to do only what they feel and desire. Then, they expect that God accept their actions, as if God is somehow subject to us and not vice versa. The Scriptures simply do not allow for this type of an approach toward God. If we are going to please God, then we must know what He Himself desires. The only way we can know this is if He tells us. That is, He must reveal His own mind to us. This is what the Scriptures are: a revelation of the mind of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10ff). Only when we, by faith, base our actions upon the mind of God, then can we be assured that we are pleasing Him. Once we move away from the Scriptures, we will only be guessing our way to service, presumptuously acting upon our own feelings. Knowing that God's thoughts and ways are not ours (cf. Isa. 55:9), we dare not attempt to act apart from the knowledge of His revelation. This is one reason why the issue of the silence of the Scriptures is so critical. To act upon God's silence is to act without knowledge that such an action is pleasing to Him (like trying to quote an author on something he never said – we would call that misrepresentation). At

best, acting upon silence is presumptuous; at worst it is outright rebellion. Bernard Ramm expressed the issue this way:

“When one turns to the question of authority in religion the basic problem immediately arises: is there anything in religion which demands that a man think a certain way about religion and not another? Is there a man, a society, a principle, or a document which has the right to prescribe religious belief?

“Nothing could be more foolish in religion than the rejection of an authority which contained the truth of the living God; and nothing could be more tragic than the substitution of the voice of man for the voice of God.” (16)

This need for authority is illustrated well throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The first sin and its consequences is a testimony to what can happen when people rebel against God’s authority (Gen. 3). Cain’s murder of Abel (Gen. 4), Korah’s rebellion (Num. 16), the new cart incident (1 Chron. 13:1-12; 15:12-15), King Uzziah’s downfall (2 Chron. 26), and many other cases all have in common the problem of rejecting the authority God had established. In the context of worship, though, we should especially consider Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-3). They were in the service of God and the tabernacle. While it may not seem like a big problem to offer a “strange fire” before the Lord, we are quickly told that it was not what the Lord had commanded. Were they acting presumptuously upon God’s silence, thinking perhaps, “He didn’t say not to”? Were they in outright rebellion, knowing that such would not please God? Either way, the consequences were severe. What was the real problem? Was it just about the fire? God explained it to Moses and Aaron: “By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored” (vs. 3). It was about God’s honor! We should, at the least, see that submitting to God’s authority in our service to Him is about honoring God. Worshipping God is not about what we like; it is always about what glorifies and honors God! It

is all about God. It is His honor and glory that make the issue of authority so important. To veer away from His authority is to dishonor Him. Let none say that we don't need authority to engage in our worship toward Him! The way to honor God is to do what He says. It need not be more complicated.

In the New Testament, the same point is clearly made. It is a mistake to think that God cared about what people did and how they did it in the Old Testament, but now we are free to do what we want in our worship toward Him. The Pharisees questioned Jesus in Matthew 21:23-27: "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" The question recognizes two principles: first, that there is a need to have authority for the things that are done; and second, the authority must come from one who has the power to grant it. These two issues were not challenged by Jesus. What Jesus challenged was the Pharisees' inconsistencies relative to those two issues. Jesus responded by pointing out that there are only two possible sources of authority: Heaven (i.e., God) or men. As argued, the only way that one can know whether or not something comes from God is by looking into the revelation of His mind. If it cannot be found in His revelation, then the action will have been authored by men. There are no other choices.

If we believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God (as we should), then His attitude toward authority should serve as our pattern. Jesus "consistently used the Old Testament Scriptures as the authoritative court of appeal in His controversies with the scribes and Pharisees" (Virkler 34). Even the radical scholar Rudolph Bultmann recognized Jesus' commitment to the authority of the Scriptures: "Jesus agreed always with the scribes of his time in accepting without question the authority of the (Old Testament) Law" (61). Jesus never attacked the authority of the Law, but rather the interpretations and traditions of those who were claiming to follow the Law. By their unscriptural maneuvering, they "managed to circumvent the clear and authoritative teachings to be found in it" (Virkler 34). Jesus' commitment to the authority of the Father and

the Scriptures was beyond doubt; and if we are true disciples of Jesus, abiding in His word (John 8:31), then our commitment to the authority of Scripture will also be beyond doubt.

Consider what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

“Lawlessness” is behavior that is without regard for what God’s law says. It is acting against and without the authority of God. Even though Jesus’ name is attached to something, if it is without God’s approval (“the will of My Father”), it is wrong (Luke 6:46). To enter the kingdom of heaven, we must do the will of God. Can anything be any more foundational than this?

Many other passages demonstrate this need (John 8:31-32; 1 Cor. 4:6; Phil. 3:16; Eph. 6:1-6; Col. 3:17; 2 Thess. 2:7; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 John 9-11; Rev. 22:18-19). The New Testament clearly shows that God will not tolerate men substituting their will for His. We must, by faith, abide in His word if we will please Him. Some still deny that we need authority. In such a denial, there are only two things they can appeal to as sources of authority. They will either look to themselves as authority, or they will look to others as authority. Either way, they have entered a path leading to judgment, for they have then rejected the authority of God (Prov. 14:12; Matt. 15:9; Col. 2:20-22). This is why we must continue to plead for teaching that is grounded only in His Word (cf. Isa. 8:20). Commitment to God’s authority will allow nothing else.

On Knowing What is Authorized

One may agree that we need the authority of God to act, but how do we know exactly what is authorized? How do we determine that something is, in fact, from God? This question is usually answered by saying that we must act based upon command, approved example, and necessary inference. The problem is then often raised: “but where do you find that in the Bible?” In other words, there is no place in the Bible where we can turn and argue that it explicitly says that “command, example, and necessary inference” is the only method for understanding God’s authority. Critics charge that such a paradigm is itself made up by men, and therefore invalid as a means of determining what is authorized.

However, what may at first look like a decent point has some serious flaws. Back up to a more basic level and ask, “How does any communication take place?” We need to remember that this is God communicating His will to us. While His word is inspired, He has revealed His word by using human language so that we can understand it. Further, His method of communication is in the same pattern for how any of us communicate with anyone else (how else could we understand?). How do you communicate your desires to someone else? The answer is essentially this: we tell people what we want, we show them what we want, or we imply something that we expect them to understand (through language, expressions, etc.). Can you think of any other way to communicate? We tell (explicit), show (illustrate), or imply (implicit) our desires. No one can communicate anything without accepting these as axiomatic (just try it). This is exactly how God has communicated to us.

When we speak of command (or direct statement), example, or necessary inference (drawing an inescapable conclusion based upon information given), it is simply a way of formally stating how any communication works. It is not a new idea or a man-made hermeneutic. It is recognition of the process of communication (and I would challenge critics to try to communicate their disagreements without utilizing these very ways). Without these, no

communication can take place; they are basic (needing no further proof). What this means, then, is that if we will know what God authorizes for us, then we must look at what He has told us directly, what He has shown us through illustrations and examples, and what He has implied for us to “get” (e.g., see how Peter got the point that he should not call any man unclean, Acts 10:9-17, 28).

As is the case with any communication, we also recognize that there are both general and specific aspects to direct statements, examples, and implications. The more specific a statement is the fewer options a person will have in carrying out the order. Conversely, the more general a statement is, the more options one will have. For example, the order to “Go to the store and get bread” has both specific and general elements to it. If the method of “going” is not specific and there is no more information given, then the person can choose various ways of getting to the store without violating the order (walk, ride a bike, drive, etc.). “The store” itself is generic, unless it is understood by inference to be a specific store (a certain food mart, grocery, etc.). It is the same with bread. Contrast that statement with, “Drive your car to Joe’s Mart and get one large package of cracked sourdough wheat bread.” The point is that the same recognition of communication is inherent in the understanding of what God has given for us to do. When He is specific about what He wants (e.g., sing in order to praise and edify), we don’t have the option of substituting or adding a coordinate action (e.g., play an instrument). In terms of our worshipping God, we need to look at His direct statements, the examples He has provided, and take into account any required inferences based upon the information revealed.

On Worship and Authority

In the discussion Jesus had with the Samaritan woman, she asked Him about worship, bringing up the issue of where worship should occur – at Mt. Gerizim or in Jerusalem (John

4:20). Jesus' answer (vv. 21ff) shows that it is ultimately not the place that is important, but rather the character of the worship: in spirit and truth. God seeks true worshipers, not those who simply go through actions or who refuse to do what He says. Truth, and the authority that springs from it, is critical to worshipping God properly. Jesus told the woman, "You worship what you do not know" (vs. 22). The worship of the Samaritans was subjectively determined, not at all what God was seeking because it was not what had been revealed by God. Ignorant worship cannot be done in spirit and truth. Again, this highlights the fact that we need to know what God wants from us so that we can submit to His authority and worship Him according to His expectations. We should be seeking to do and be what He seeks, to worship Him in spirit and truth. This impacts both the group and the individual Christian.

The central question here is this: are there specific activities God wants disciples to engage in when they come together in assemblies? This focuses upon the actions of a local congregation (which will be discussed in more detail throughout this book). When Christians meet together in order to serve God as a group, the Scriptures authorize particular activities as expressions of worship. This is not to say that individuals cannot worship God separately from others (even then it needs to be done with respect for God's authority), but that God does desire for Christians to meet together in His honor and to His glory by engaging in certain actions. These actions include our collective praise and mutual edification through verbal song (cf. Eph. 5:19), prayers (cf. Acts 2:42), and jointly partaking in the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 11:18ff; Acts 20:7). Further, the disciples taught and edified one another by studying God's will (e.g., Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 14; cf. Col. 4:16; 1 Tim. 4:13), and funds were collected so that the given congregation could carry out its specific work (as in the collection on the first day of the week for needy saints, 1 Cor. 16). These actions are authorized because they come to us from God as revealed in His Scriptures. If we began adding or substituting with

activities of our own desire, we would become guilty of accepting our own authority over that of God's. By doing these activities in faith for the glory of God, the edification of the group, with proper order (1 Cor. 14), and in spirit and truth, we can know that we are pleasing Him.

On Authority and Division

Apostasy is the process of falling away due to rebellion: "to cause people to rebel against or to reject authority — 'to incite to revolt, to cause to rebel'" (Louw and Nida 498). That is, falling away from truth and God is due to the rejection of His authority in favor of human authority. Paul spoke of apostasy showing itself by forbidding marriage and certain foods (1 Tim. 4:1-5). The related idea in 2 Thess. 2:3-12 means "to rise up in open defiance of authority, with the presumed intention to overthrow it or to act in complete opposition to its demands" (Louw and Nida 497). Thus the Bible recognizes that there would be those who reject God's authority and become deceived. Paul warned of those who would heap up for themselves teachers to tell them only what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:2-4). They would no longer be satisfied with God's authority, so they will look to others to provide it as long as it makes them feel good. The end result is apostasy.

Usually apostasy begins fairly slowly. "Small" compromises made here and there add up to a greater departure from truth down the road. There is less stress on what the Bible teaches and more stress upon what the leaders of a particular dogma say. What the leaders say then becomes more important than what the Bible itself teaches. In order to safeguard their own fellowships, the leaders then begin to establish creeds that they expect everyone else to bow to. We need to be warned. No paper, school, foundation, or any group of men is our source of authority! When we begin to look to these other men to see what we should be thinking or doing apart from our own study of God's word, then we are in the process of crossing over into

apostasy. It matters not what a particular teacher says or what is written in a paper, these men can never become our authority. So while we strongly proclaim allegiance to the word of God (as it should be), beware lest we place too much emphasis on the work and teachings of men. We must constantly reassess our attitudes toward Scripture (cf. Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 2:13).

When differences begin to exist over issues of authority, divisions are not far behind. . Issues over which churches have divided are rooted in matters of authority, and generally involve the practices of the whole congregation. For example, if someone brings instrumental music into the collective worship, those who cannot conscientiously practice must refuse to participate. Therefore, division results because of a failure to respect 1) God's authority, 2) the consciences of others, and 3) the unity of the Lord's people (cf., Rom. 14; Eph. 4:1-6). Similarly, when leaders press for the funds of the group to be spent in questionable activities, such as social matters, recreation, and donations to human institutions, there will be division with those who cannot conscientiously accept these things as part of the work of the church. Again, the division results because there is no respect for God's authority, for the consciences of others, and for the unity of the Spirit. Unity cannot last when authority breaks down.

What can be done? First, we must constantly reaffirm our commitment to the authority of God and His word. The Bible is the authority for our faith and practice, so we must know it, study it well, and teach it soundly.

Second, every generation needs this reaffirmation of the authority of God. A generation that grows up without understanding the basic principles of authority will almost certainly move further away from God's truth. Because of Israel's failure to teach succeeding generations the importance of what God said, "there arose another generation ... who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). Can we afford to let this tragedy be repeated in our own children?

Third, we must continually reassess our attitudes toward both God and others. Don't think that the only difference between conservative churches of Christ and, say, the Christian Church is that "they" use instruments and "we" don't. The difference is one of attitude toward Scripture. The division over instrumental music is a symptom of this much greater problem. We need to view Scripture as authoritative for everything, and not try to skirt on the edge of what is questionable. We must respect the silence of Scripture as well as honor what is plainly taught by God. These principles are basic to authority. We also need to respect others. We cannot "run roughshod" over others simply because we have a selfish desire to practice something.

Fourth, we need to keep our spiritual mission before us. It is easy to get side-tracked and deluded into thinking that social and recreational practices will fulfill what God wants. Our mission is primarily spiritual in nature. Going to heaven is what this is all about. To do this, we must keep our focus upon Christ and Him crucified (cf. John 12:32; 1 Cor. 2:2). Lift up the crucified Christ as the means of salvation, and let's not cheapen His work by resorting to carnal and fleshly means to draw people in.

Conclusion

For most, this study is nothing new or earth-shattering. Because of the basic nature of authority, we might be drawn into a lull, thinking that it doesn't need to be taught much or that everyone already knows about it. The efforts here are to encourage us all to recommit ourselves continually to the authority of God and His word and to teach it to others.

Virtually every page of the Bible testifies to the authority of God. He is Lord and King of all. The Scriptures present to us a fundamental choice about whether or not we will submit to His authority. He has graciously given us all we need to live a blessed life here with the hope of heaven. A rejection of His authority is also a rejection of His grace, for He is the only one in the

position of the authority to be able to offer grace in this way. Acceptance of His authority brings with it the peace that only He can give. Some of Moses' last words to the children of Israel focused on this very point: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them" (Deut. 30:19-20). Some of the first words to Joshua after Moses' death also focused on this point: "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success" (Josh. 1:7-8). James echoes this in the New Testament: "But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does" (1:25). Let's choose life and blessings by loving and obeying God!

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