

AUTHORITY: OF KINGS AND BEASTS

An exposition of Colossians 4:1
at West Hills San Jose on May 16, 2021

PASTORAL PRAYER: Praise Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thank you for creating us and all that we have, thank you for this fellowship and these families, strengthen us to love one another as you have loved us in Christ.

PROBLEM: Grace and peace to you West Hills community church, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ our Lord! **Today we are going to be unpacking some of the biblical teaching on the stewardship of authority and power.** But before we can talk about what the Scripture says, we need to address the elephant in the room. About 150 years ago, the English historian Jon Acton once commented in a letter to another church historian Bishop Creighton

“I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men with a favorable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way against holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility **has to make up for the want** of legal responsibility. Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” That last sentence, for some reason, is a sentence that most of you are probably familiar with. This sentiment underlies the very structure of our government. No one should have too much power because power tends to corrupt. Thus the various branches and the system of checks and balances. So being American, it would seem that we are already oriented toward being naturally suspicious of authority and authority structures.

And I’m not a sociologist, but it seems to me that in our culture right now there is a strong tug toward the assumption that authority and power itself is the problem. That if an individual or an institution abuses or has every abused their authority, then the institution is inherently broken, and the very fact that someone had authority to abuse in the first place was the problem. And the solution being offered in many cases, is that we should just tear the whole thing down. Now I have no interest in tearing down a straw-man, but I would point out that the biblical view of authority is slightly less pessimistic than many of us would naturally assume. God is our authority. God gives authority to mankind and to various human institutions for the good of the world. The presence of different form of authority in the world is inescapable, and the problem with the world, and there is a HUGE problem, is not authority itself but human sin. Power does tend to corrupt, but in Christ Jesus it doesn’t HAVE TO. **The authority and power of Jesus Christ...has the opposite effect on people.** He can take the corrupt and the wicked and deliver them from the power of sin and death and restore them to His image, in righteousness and justice. He can give us authority in a way that leads to life and light and righteousness, by submitting our hearts to Him in how we use it.

MAIN POINT: Righteous authority glorifies God, so deal with others as God has dealt with you

SETTING THE CONTEXT: Please open your bibles to Colossians 3. Today we are picking up where we left off in Paul’s teaching on godly home life. And of course this picture of a godly home is the first concrete example of what it looks like to live a heaven oriented life. Colossians

3:1 said if you have been raised with Christ seek the things that are above. If we have received the gospel, if we have internalized it's message, if our souls have been united to Jesus and our life and our hope and our future are with Christ in God...here is how we ought to live at home.

And we have noted a number of things as we have passed slowly through this text word by word and verse by verse. This is written to a standard Roman family, where in terms of the law and the culture the Father, Husband Master possessed ultimate power and responsibility over every member of the house. Culturally, his obligation was to protect, preserve and provide for all of their needs and they in response were to display absolute loyalty to him. And yet in this profoundly patriarchal context, we find Paul coming along and addressing women directly, children directly and servants directly. This is surprising because it assumes both the dignity and moral responsibility of everyone in the house in Christ Jesus. And now we are coming to the end of this section at Col 4:1, but we will begin our reading from the beginning at Colossians 3:18. Let's now humble our minds, recognizing that there is always more for us to understand and comprehend, and open our hearts recognizing that the Word of God has been given for our blessing and our benefit, to aide and encourage us in our walks with God, for the reading of His Holy Word.

READING: Colossians 3:18–4:1 [18] Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. [19] Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. [20] Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. [21] Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. [22] Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. [23] Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, [24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. [25] For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. [1] Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (ESV) May God's Spirit impress and seal these truths upon your soul forever.

ROAD MAP: 1.) The context of authority, 2.) the right use of authority, 3.) the motivations for God glorifying authority

THE CONTEXT OF AUTHORITY

1. Today's text is Colossians 4:1 the portion addressed to the master of servants. And you might be thinking to yourself, well how in the world can this text possibly apply to me. Let me just tip my hand at the front end of the message to get you involved. This teaching arises in the context of a relationship between a master and his servants, but the underlying issue is not fundamentally rooted in that kind of relationship. I see something more basic going on than that. I think this command is fundamentally rooted in the righteous USE of authority. That's what Paul is ultimately talking about.
1. So now the question is, do you have any authority in any of your relationships in your life? And I think the answer is YOUR life is probably FULL of relationships which contain some element of authority, either you possess authority over others, or they possess authority over you. Some of that authority is formalized: the authority of church

elders, authority at work, your authority over your children, the authority of the police and the government. You actually possess authority as a member of the priesthood of believers. We are all called priests, prophets and kings in Jesus Christ. And the kingly aspect of that office involves how you use your abilities authority in the kingdom of God. Your life is surrounded by formal authority.

2. But there is also a lot of relational authority that is informal. Informal authority is the authority we grant to other people in our lives, or that they grant to you. People might grant you significant input in how they make decisions based on level of trust, level of expertise, character or something else.
3. If we had some windows that needed to be replaced, and the elders got together and approved a plan, but then afterwards Patrick or Kevin McCoy said don't do it that's a bad idea. We would probably listen to Patrick, not because of some formal reason but for a relational one. We trust Patrick, Patrick knows a lot about windows, a lot more than I do anyway. And because of that relational authority he possesses, we would concede to his input. What I want to talk about today is the fact that Patrick is capable of wielding that authority righteously to bless the church, or unrighteously to take advantage of us.
4. Similarly YOU have some degree of authority in the lives of others AND YOU can either wield that authority righteously or unrighteously, and today I want to engage a biblical paradigm for how to steward authority well.
2. Let's begin doing that by taking a step back from 4:1 and considering the structure of the household text as a whole. What has Paul done so far? It's important to see this...
3. Paul upholds the traditional vision of Roman home life while completely destabilizing peoples underlying motivations. In other words, Paul tells the members of the house to do what any upstanding and honorable member of a Roman house would do...but he gives them radically different motivation for doing it.
 1. If you look at this text through the lens of the one who holds authority, which I think you are supposed to do...you wife is supposed to submit to you, but not because you deserve it or are owed it or because she's scared to. She's going to do it for Christ. And she will be rewarded by Christ, her approval comes ultimately from Christ more than you.
 2. Children should honor you, not because you're honorable, not because you're capable, not because you are so shockingly wonderful and wise...but for Christ.
 3. Servants are to work hard for you from the heart, not because you are a good master, or because they fear you, but because they are going to be rewarded by Christ.
 4. So the house can continue running smoothly, but the root of your authority has been taken out of your hands and given to God. For those under your leadership...they are obeying out of the fear of the Lord...not you. You are still in charge...kind of. You are still the master of your house on paper...but there is a new master of your house in reality.
 5. And I think that leads Paul to leave the punchline to the end. Look at the structure of these instructions...
4. Chapter 4:1 says Masters but do you know what that word is in Greek? It's Lord. Kurios, the same word used for the Lord God and the Lord Jesus throughout the rest of this text. I don't think Paul is trying to equate the authority of the master with the authority of God...but I think he is trying to situate them in relationship to one another. Everyone, obey the capital L

Lord...oh and by the way, lower case lord...I have something to say to you also. Look at the text...

5. Everyone's obligation to the lord of the house is rooted in the Lordship of God. Except for the houses lord.
 1. Wives, verse 18 submit because of **the Lord**, husbands verse 19 be nice.
 2. Children v 20 obey because it pleases **the Lord**. Fathers v 21, don't be mean
 3. Servants v 22 obey in everything fearing the Lord, because the Lord rewards you...
 4. And finally he says...lords...be just and fair...because you are also a slave. You also have a master in heaven. You also have had the root of authority taken from you...and placed into the hands of the King of Heaven and earth. What is Paul doing here?
6. Paul is clarifying, that you are the master of the house for a few more years...and then you will meet the TRUE master of your house. I think the punchline is that in the kingdom of God...the Lord Jesus has become the Sovereign over all, and all of us are the same before His throne.
7. Paul makes the expectations laid upon every member of the house, public. In a situation where all of us are brothers and sisters, and all of us have different levels of responsibility he wants every person to understand what the righteous expression of each role looks like, and especially the one who bears authority.
 1. If you are a boss, and an employee comes to you and claims that you have been unfair to them, you need to remember that you also have a boss in heaven and seek to deal justly and fairly with them.
 2. IF you are a husband and your wife says you have been speaking harshly to me, you need to remember that you are under authority too. And your authority says that in His kingdom, when one of us sins, we must repent. And if we repent, we must forgive.
8. This is the context of whatever authority you possess. IN the big picture, God is Lord over all of you. And the authority that has been stewarded to you is not absolute. It's to be submitted to the will of God, it is to be used according to the will of God. This is the context of our God-given authority.

THE RIGHT USE OF AUTHORITY

1. So authority is a real and unavoidable part of our life, and all of us possess some degree of authority in our relationships with others. Some of it formal, like fathers and elders, and evangelists and sisters of the church, and teachers, or counselors. Some of it is informal in our various relationships. But all of us possess some kinds of authority. And with that authority comes the ability to effect others either for good or for evil, and what makes authority good or bad is how YOU and I choose to wield that authority.
2. One of the things I've always enjoyed about Scripture, is it's ability to communicate profound things through symbols and images. And one of the symbolic contrasts you can observe in the bible relates to how human beings steward their authority. These two contrasting symbols are the images of the righteous king, and the beast. And I think that part of the reason the bible communicates in symbols rather than just specific historical details is that it invites you to reflect on possible connections between historical events.

1. So in Revelation 13 we read Revelation 13:1, 5–8 [1] And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads...[5] And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. [6] It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. [7] Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, [8] and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. (ESV)
3. The author could just said a wicked king. But in using the symbol of a beast, we are forced to pause and consider the fact that we have seen a number of beastly kings and kingdoms, in Daniel 7 we see four wicked beast kingdoms appointed to rise and fall.
 1. In Daniel 5, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon exalted himself and God humbled him by making him crazy and leaving him in to wander the wilderness like a beast for 7 years.
 2. In Ezekiel 32 the prophet tells Pharaoh, you consider yourself a lion of the nations, but **YOU ARE LIKE A DRAGON** in the seas; you burst forth in your reverse, trouble the waters with your feet and foul their rivers. In Ezekiel 29:3 we find that Pharaoh is under judgement because he rules over the Nile saying ‘My Nile is my own I made it for myself.’
 3. And of course we think of the garden, where the Serpent was the craftiest beast of the field, using his wisdom to build a relationship of informal persuasive authority over Eve and to ultimately plunge mankind into ruin.
4. Where we see beasts we see destruction, where see beasts we see pride, where we see beasts we see authorities who use and devour those under their care for their own personal desires. Where we see beastly authorities we find people who are not looking to serve but to be served and to take life for the sake of themselves. There are wild beasts in the NT also, wolves seeking to destroy the flock in Acts 20:29-31, and Satan prowls like a lion seeking someone to devour in 1 Peter 5:8...
 1. The nature of beastly authority is that it seeks the good of itself at the expense of others. It is bent inward...seeking to use instead of bless, to take rather than give, it would rather devour than cultivate, it is pride leading to destruction. What do you see when you look in the mirror?
 2. None of you probably look in the mirror and see Rev 13. But you do see a trajectory of life. How are you stewarding your influence in the lives of others? Are you using your words to build up or to tear down. Are you looking to cultivate or consume? In what ways are you seeking to affect the world around you? In a way that enables you to boast? Or in a way that would increase everyones boast in God? IF you are on a beastly trajectory...repent. There is good news even for beasts. When Nebu came out of his beastly nightmare and into his right mind...he repented and exalted the God of heaven... and the Lord restored all that he had.

3. If you have sinned repent, there is forgiveness and healing in Jesus. The King of kings is in the business of transforming tyrants into servants, and sinners into saints. Humble yourself and you will be redeemed and restored for His glory.
5. And if you repent, you will be able to appreciate the positive vision that God has for authority. The righteous king. God says in 2 Sam 23:3-4 “The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.
 1. When one stewards their authority righteously, it’s like when the sun finally comes out after a long night of keeping watch because of thieves and enemies. When people use their authority in a God fearing way, it’s like when the rains fall guaranteeing that the ground will give life for the coming year. The Righteous use of authority is glorious and glorifies God.
6. And of course righteous authority is what human beings were made for. Adam and Eve were given the cultural mandate to bear fruit and multiply and to extend the sacred space of the garden over the entire earth. And they were to serve as God’s co-regents OVER all of creation, as the reigning authorities.
 1. As redemptive history moves forward, God begins to describe SALVATION as the coming of a righteous authority. A Messiah, a King of righteousness who save the people from their sins.
 2. In Isaiah 11:4 A son of Jess will be born and the Spirit of God will be upon Him. And He will judge the nation [4] but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth (ESV)
 3. ACTually righteousness and equity are the two words that occur in Colossians 4:1. The word we translate justly and fairly, in Greek literally convey the same ideas of Isaiah 11:4. In Psalm 72 the promised Messiah king is doing the same thing, ruling with justice and equity.
7. When Jesus finally comes he teaches his followers about righteous authority and sets godly authority in contrast to the trajectory of the beast.
 1. Matthew 20:25–28 [25] But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. [26] It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, [27] and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, [28] even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (ESV)
 2. The Son of Man of course exemplifies the righteous use of authority in both his teaching and his example taking on the role of servant King for the salvation and preservation of his people.
8. But I think you see some helpful things in contrasting these two pictures. There is the beast that uses authority for Himself, and there is the righteous King who bears His authority for the good of others. Paul in Colossians 4:1, calls all of us who bear authority into the example of the righteous king. He even says give those under your care justice and equity.

9. To deal JUSTLY with someone means to deal with them in manner that conforms to the will of God. To deal fairly with someone is to not only be righteous but reasonable. In my house, all of us are called to the same standard of holiness, but my expectations of my 2 year old are different than my expectations of my wife. When my 2 year old lies to me, I recognize this is a very little boy, who is in the very beginning of the process of learning the importance of telling the truth. My 8 year old already understands the importance of telling the truth and so a lie would be dealt with differently in terms of consequences. I want to use my authority in a way that is JUST but also fair.
10. And what is fundamental to doing that well is walking in the example of our ultimate authority Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but TO SERVE and to use His life for the purpose of blessing others. That is the right way to use authority.

So what have we seen so far? We have first seen the context of our authority. We are all people who have been stewarded with some level of authority, as ones under authority. God is sovereign, and we are to conduct ourselves in a way that is consistent with his will. Second we looked two pictures of how people use authority, we saw a beast and a righteous king. When we use authority to serve ourselves, we act like the beast. When we use our authority to serve others, we are acting like the righteous King. And what was described in prophecy and principle was incarnated in the person and example of Jesus Christ. Let's now close with a brief reflection on our motivation for righteous authority.

THE MOTIVATIONS FOR GOD GLORIFYING AUTHORITY

1. Paul says, Masters treat your bondservants justly and fairly...and then he SAYS KNOWING
 1. Grammatically in greek, this is a recognition of knowledge that became effective in the past and now has ongoing ramifications for the future.
 2. This is something that the reader has settled in His mind already and has direct implications for how we use authority. Be just and fair KNOWING that you also have a master in heaven.
11. This can be taken as a warning or an encouragement. Treat them kindly or else. Or treat them kindly because think about how your master has treated you! I kept going back and forth all week as if it was either one or the other, but I'm now convinced Paul expects you to hear both. Because it is both...isn't it? You DO have a master to whom each of you are accountable and HE IS the greatest most lovingly Master to ever have existed, and the way you are going to be inclined to hear this verse is probably directly related to how you have been using your authority? If you have been acting selfishly, or proudly, or sinfully...this is a warning to you.
12. In reminding you that you have a Master in heaven He is reminding you:
 1. All that you do, and all your underlying motives are open and laid bare before the Lord
 2. You will be held accountable for your actions, and all use of your authority
 3. Your heavenly Master has a clear and definite will for how you ought to use your authority. And if you wield your authority in a way that is inconsistent with His will, you are not just abusing your servant...you are sinning against God.
 4. And how you use your authority is a matter of significance to God. It matters to Him.

5. Lord's you should treat those under your authority, the way you want YOUR LORD to treat you.
13. On the other hand, maybe you are using your authority to try and help. Paul is encouraging you and motivating you to persevere remembering:
 1. You were a slave that has been redeemed and freed from a wicked master of sin. And you have been brought into service to a fair and just king. A King who reigns in righteousness with equity.
 2. Your King doesn't just fairly and justly provide for you, He cares for your entire being and seeks your ultimate welfare in all things.
 3. Your LORD and authority, the LORD Jesus Christ, doesn't just reign over you with power and provision...He loves you. He cares about you. When He sees you struggling and falling short, He doesn't despise you, He has sympathy Heb 4:15, He has grace to help you. Even His discipline is grace, since it's aim is to train you and produce in you the peaceful fruit of righteousness!
 4. Your Master doesn't deal with you as your sins deserves but takes your failures upon Himself to restore you to right standing with God. Look to Him and be healed!
 5. Your master doesn't treat you like property, but honors His image in you and graciously worked to restore you to the fullness of dignity for which you were created.
 6. Authorities you should keeping striving to treat others the way your Masters has treated you, you should love, because He first loved you.
14. It's not hard to see how by writing this simple sentence, Paul has laid the seeds for the undoing of slavery as an entire institution.
15. This little sentence...sets the Christian thinker on a trajectory that ultimately led to the concept of human dignity and rights becoming an indispensable framework for western society.
16. What is our primary motivation for using our authority righteously...remembering that we have a King in heaven, and to Him we will give an account. We have a King in heaven and His ways are higher than our ways and His ways are just better than our ways and we should imitate God's righteous king, and reject all of our impulses to act like a beast.
17. Now let me close with a few very practical suggestions for some ways you can use your informal authority today, like a righteous king.
 1. Every single time we are together adults, you have the ability to speak words of life over these little ones. Words of encouragement and affirmation. Words that discourage evil and encourage good. You may not be their mom or their dad, but if you're our brother or sister then you are like an uncle or an aunt. And you can use your influence to bless.
 2. If you have formal authority, LISTEN TO ME and you recognized as I was painting the pictures of the beast and the king, where there are ways you have fallen short and went beastly with someone. You should apologize. To God and to the one you offended.
 3. Every single one of you has informal authority with the other people in this church. Your words possess power to encourage, to challenge us to grow, to affirm, to call us out when something doesn't seem right. Have you been using the authority stewarded to you by God or have you been neglecting it?

18. Everyone in this room, in different ways, is always trying to answer the question “am I accepted?” Some people ask am I good enough? Some people ask am I wanted. Some people ask is it safe for me here. And every single one of you have power to shape how the people sitting around you answer that question. And we will use that power like a selfish beast...or we will use that power like a righteous king. IF you continue to steward that authority righteously with concern for others more than ourselves, you and I will continue to shape this community into something beautiful, and wonderful and full of love and mercy and hope. Righteous authority glorifies God, so deal with others as God has dealt with you. Let’s pray

COMMUNION: IT is now time for us to come to the table of the Lord and receive this eucharistic meal, this meal of thanksgiving. And we come giving thanks because regardless of how others have treated you, regardless of how others may have made you feel, the question in your heart of “am I accepted” finds its deepest and most meaningful YES at this table. Does God know the real you? Yes. Does God see and understand all of your weaknesses and failures? Yes. Are you acceptable to Him? No in yourself you are not. But God in His great love, sent His only begotten Son the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh to give up His life, to serve you by offering Himself once, the just for the unjust that He might bring you to God. God in His grace MAKES YOU acceptable. And we are accepted by God not by fixing ourselves or becoming better. We are accepted by faith in Jesus Christ. And this meal reminds us NOT ONLY that we are accepted but that this acceptance was given to us by the righteousness of another and we are free to come, week by week, year by year, to receive from the fullness of His grace. This is how God in Christ uses His authority over you...