

Biblical Authority and Church Missions

By Jeff Noblit

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Monday, November 4, 2013

Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

I'm going to talk about biblical authority and church missions. Biblical authority and church missions. I want to talk about authority being the institution of God. I'm glad we've got a good collection of young people sitting down here this evening because you need to understand that God has ordained human authorities over your lives to guide you so that you might know God's will, but all of us are under God ordained authority and authorities. For example, in Romans 13:1-2, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority," let that sink into your thinking, "whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance," or the institution, "of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." Now, the context is honoring the authority of civil government as long as they're not outside of Scripture but it certainly applies to all authority. I think you parents will agree, our children should understand that parental authority is the institution of God and to resist authority is to resist God, and on and on we could go.

There's an interesting little story in Acts 23:1-5. The Apostle Paul has been brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court, and the Apostle Paul is being interrogated and he's quite honestly being very direct in his rebuttal and his exhortations back to them. As a matter of fact, verse 3, Paul says to them, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed walls!" They had struck the Apostle Paul and so when you called a Jew a whitewashed wall, you have really cut them big time because the wall referred to the tomb and a tomb was a place of uncleanness. Then verse 4, "But the bystanders said, 'Do you revile God's high priest?'" Notice what Paul does, "And Paul said, 'I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people."'" So here Paul is before these very wicked and hypocritical Jewish religious authorities yet he has such a high view of God instituted authority, even though they are totally wrong, Paul says in effect, "I'm wrong. I should not have brought a condemning word against God's high priest." Brothers and sisters, look, if you've got any spiritual maturity, it's not the person or the performance, it's the position of authority God has ordered you to respect. Now, that doesn't mean you submit to everything. If they tell you to do something evil, obviously you can't do that, but you still respect the position or the office of authority.

Now, though I like aspects of Western civilization and particularly our country's rugged individualism, there is an unbalanced and sinful downside to that. Sometimes rugged individualism gets into the church and it gets into body life and it manifests itself in a

sinful way and what I call, II. An independent spirit and self authority. An independent spirit and self authority. Proverbs 18:1-2 speaks of this kind of person, "He who separates himself seeks his own desire." In other words, "I'm not going to work in a community of people, I'm not going to consult with others, particularly those in authority over me. I'm my own authority. I want to separate myself off, do my own thing." Why does he do that? Because he seeks his own desire. Now he may say he's doing a lot of other things, but at the root of it he seeks his own desire. "He quarrels against all sound wisdom. A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind." Sometimes a young person can get an independent and spirit of self authority and only be interested in their own mind being revealed, not listening to what their parents think. Or a wife can get that way. Or an employee can get that way. Or a church member about their church authorities can get that way and it is sin and it is wrong.

Jude 1:8-9, "Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh." He's talking about a corrupt and vile person and he says they, "reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" Now, that's interesting, is it not? Here's Michael, the holy and righteous archangel, who will not even bring a direct rebuke against Satan because, again, God made Satan in a high office of glory, beauty and authority, and so Michael says, "I respect the office God has given him and will not even bring a judgment or an accusation against the devil because of the office he holds." Once again, a statement of God's view of the high level of God ordained authority.

2 Peter 2:10, "and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires," here it is again, "and despise authority." Now, here's something that almost irrevocably is connected together. A person who rejects God ordained authority almost always has other sin issues you may not know about. Did you hear that? When they do not gladly and humbly honor the authority God places over them, they have usually sin issues. You may or may not know about them but they're usually there. That's why he compiles together this person who indulges in the flesh, in corrupt desires and they despise authority. "They are daring," 2 Peter 2:10, "self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties." They are just kind of course and brazen. They have, listen, they have no concept of when they are sinfully walking and rejecting God's authority over them that they are defiling the very principles of God's heavenly ordinance. They just don't have any problem with it. They are just brazen about it, bold and daring.

1 Peter 2:13, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority." So we could go on and on and on and on but the Bible makes very clear that God has ordained that we as Christians function in connectivity to others and we function in that connectivity, in that body life, if you will, the local church, under God ordained authority. We function in the home connected to each other under the authority of parents and wives under the authority of the husband. You can go on to government. You can go on to employers. That's the way the all wise, Triune God has ordained culture, the family and primarily his eternal and most important institution, the

church, to function. We must not have a sinful independent spirit and a self authority about us.

III. Be aware that we are very capable of putting on outward forms of godliness without the inward reality of godliness. Outward forms or appearance without the inward substance. 2 Timothy 3:5 in the context really of an insubordinate spirit within a church, Paul says to Timothy as he's helping Timothy to pastor, there are those who are "holding to a form of godliness," they have an outward appearance; they're very impressive; people are very impressed by what they're putting on outwardly, "although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these." This is so easy and clear, it just is and that is when you are observing a person and they have impressed you and you see outwardly all kinds of gifts and abilities and maybe teaching, maybe preaching gifts, you see self denial and service and rejection of worldliness and you see all these things that impress you, but then if you see that person not honoring biblical authority, you say, "Aha, there it is. There is the forms of godliness but denying the reality within." You see, heathens and pagans put on extravagant outward shows but they don't have Christ within. They don't have the true godliness only he can bring. So be aware, we are able, others are able, Satan is the master counterfeiter and imitator, the outward form without inward reality and also in the context of insubordination in the church, Titus 1:16, "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him." In other words, there's the outward profession but by them showing they will not yield and submit to church authority, they show they are not truly walking in godliness, "being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." I think what's so powerfully destructive about this kind of hypocrisy is it is so appealing to man's natural assumptions about spirituality. We see these outward gifts and these outward manifestations of all kinds of self denial and commitment and giftedness and influence and compassion and care, you can go on and on, yet they deny God ordained authority.

Well, IV. Self authority arising in the local church. Self authority arising in the local church. I've already hit on that but let's go a little bit further. Titus 1:10-11. Now, Titus is in interesting book. He's on the island of Crete and the Cretans are known as a real stubborn, self-willed, insubordinate kind of people. They're just kind of a rough crowd. They are kinda like guys in a barroom a lot, they just get, literally in fistfight brawls a lot, just self-willed, strong willed, hard to get along. And God leads Titus there and says, "Get these churches cleaned up and in order." I think if I was Titus I would say, "Are you sure you don't have another assignment for me? I don't think this is, I don't think God told me to do this." You know, there's always the God card. No matter what the Scripture says, the guy says, "Well, God told me to do that." You say, "Well, what about Scripture?" "Well, no, but God told me." Well, Paul gave him this assignment and so Paul gives him some instruction and in Titus 1:10-11, "there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain." This is in the church now. Guys will pop up and say, "God is on me and God has given me authority to teach this and teach that." You know, they're getting their group together. They didn't go through the elders. They didn't get the blessing to be

in leadership or teaching, they just arose and said, "We know what God wants. Follow us." Paul said, "They must be silenced."

Titus 3:10-11 in the same flow of context, "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning." In other words, if a guy's doing that and he's getting a group to follow him and he doesn't have the blessings of church elders, you're to reject him, "knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned." If somebody is a teacher and you're impressed by them or, again, you're just drawn to them, you think they're godly, one of the first things you must do is, what church and what elder body has given you their full blessing and approval? Period. If they can't answer that well, you don't need to follow them. Is that clear? That's what the word of God says. That's what the word of God makes very clear.

Acts 20:17, "From Miletus Paul sends to Ephesus for the elders of the church." Now, Acts 20:28-30, he tells these elders, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." He said, "It's going to happen." Now, do you think this just happened in Ephesus 2,000 years ago? No, this is a pattern in every age. There will always be those who rise up and try to draw a group after them who do not go through the church elders or through the blessings of the church. Well, that's self authority arising in the church.

V. Let's talk for just a moment about pastoral authority. I do not shrink at this. I do not apologize for it because I believe in the sufficiency of the word of God. Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them." Now, you know what "obey" and "submit" means in the original Greek? It means "obey" and "submit." That's what it means. "Why? These are just men. Well, I've watched Jeff Noblit. I know he struggles like I struggle." Yeah, isn't that interesting that God's so powerful he can use very weak imperfect vessels to help you because your trust is not in me but in the God who called your pastor. But he says to obey them and submit to them, "for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account." Listen, before you start watching the guy on TV and watching the guy who wrote the latest book and you start following their discipleship and their instructions, you be mindful of one thing: they are not charged by God to give an account for your soul on Judgment Day so you're not to submit to them. You're only to submit to the one God will hold accountable for your soul and I'm telling you before God I take that very seriously. I would not have done 1,001 things that has caused me trouble personally if I didn't take that seriously. Why do you submit to these imperfect fallible men? Because God has called them to give an account for your soul.

Then he says, "Let them do this with joy and not with grief, that would be unprofitable for you." If your pastor goes around grieved because there are self-willed rebels causing trouble all the time, he's not capable of finding God and seeking God and giving you the preaching of the word like you need. If you find somebody who is a troublemaker in the church and a grief to the pastor, you ought to pull him aside and say, "Look, the souls of

my family are on the line, God has no plan B, leave that man alone so he can minister to us the way we need him to minister to us." There ought to be men of God in the church with some backbone and some courage and I've got a bunch of men like that and I thank God for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-14, "But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord." Does that bother you that there is a man, a group of men who have charge over you? You see, that's that independent spirit we've got. "Well, wait a minute now." Do you know how I know that? That's me until God broke me and then after God broke me and saved me and I learned what the Scripture said...ask Bob Pittman. He was my pastor. Bob Pittman said, "Go upstairs and get my coat," literally I ran upstairs and got his coat. Why? He was my pastor. I honored him, not perfectly, at least twice I remember I called a meeting with him and sat him down and asked his forgiveness because my spirit had not been honorable and submissive at times. Hey, we all fail, amen? But that's the spirit. People, God has given people charge over you and they give you instruction. By the way, with lots of failure and lots of weakness, I've got a 33 year record, what I am is clear before all. It's there.

He says in verse 13 of 1 Thessalonians 5, "that you esteem these men highly in love because of their work." Then he says, "Live in peace with one another." In other words, how is a body of believers, how are all these people going to have peace with one another? Here's how they are going to have, when they have a disagreement, they go to the elders and say, "Who's right?" And they say, "This guy is right. You need to get your attitude..." "Okay, we'll set that up. Let's go on peace." You respect those who have to call the shots and have to resolve issues. We're going to have issues but we can resolve them, forgive, love each other and go on. Amen? That's the way God designed the church to be.

Then verse 14, "We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly." What's the context? Some resist this. Some push against this. What are you supposed to do with them? You're to meet them in the hallway of the church, give them a phone call, talk to them in small groups and say, "Brother, your attitude is wrong. Pray for our pastors. Honor them unless they do something scandalous or a clear violation of cardinal doctrine and God will take care of you."

Look, this is the way I want my children raised. I will not tolerate a spirit in this church that would teach my children, my daughters, my son-in-laws and my grandchildren that you can dishonor God's authority. I won't have it. I will not have it. You want to get my righteous indignation to rise up, you start promoting a dishonorable spirit in this church. It destroys our children. We can't have it. It's not going to happen. I need to be under authority. When I go into an elder's meeting, I need to answer to those men in that room and you need to be under authority. Listen, if you're godly in you're humble and you'll get on your knees and you'll say, "God, I'm going to honor my pastors, you keep them right, Lord," God can discipline your pastor better than a million mean deacons can. Trust me.

I've been in his woodshed and I've been in his woodshed because God wanted you to have a better pastor.

So he says that we are to obey our pastors, submit to our pastors, esteem them highly, and to love them and admonish any who won't do that. Titus 2:15, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." Timothy was kind of young, some of the older men in the church kind of scoffed at Timothy having authority and Paul told Timothy, "No, don't let them do that. Don't let those guys get by with that. You may be younger, but you have the office of pastor. Be the pastor."

Well, pastoral authority, let's go to an aspect of it in ordaining and sending out missionaries. Pastoral authority in ordaining or sending out missionaries. 1 Timothy 5:22, Paul gives Timothy an instruction about his pastoring and he says, "Timothy, do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin." He said, "Don't lay your hands too hastily upon someone." He means this, "Don't give your approval." Laying hands on means. "I connect with you. You have my favor, my blessing. You have my approval." What he means is if a man is going into ministry, be careful, be cautious, be prayerful, be slow about giving them your blessing to go into the ministry because if they're not God called, if they're not ready, if they don't have the biblical character qualifications required, then they are going to cause a mess; they're going to damage a church; they're going to bring disillusionment to a lot of Christians and you're going to share in that sin.

All I can do is tell you the truth and ask your forgiveness. I have in the past out of the fear of man laid my hands on men too hastily. Fearful of what the repercussions would do. Mama wouldn't like it if I didn't bless their son who says he's called or whatever. I'm over that now. I have hurt some men, hurt some churches, by letting men go out with my blessing when I knew in my spirit and from the facts of their life that they were either not ready or not called at all. Now, brothers and sisters, you need to support your pastors in this decision but this is a tough and difficult thing but I take it seriously. I think in 33 years God's given us some wisdom about these things and do you know what? Look, if a boy's heart is right and he loves the Lord, when we say, "Son, I just don't believe you're ready. I'm not sure God has called you." Do you know what they'll say? "Yes, sir. I'm happy just serving the Lord here. I'll check back in six months or a year if you don't care, sir." What happened to that kind of spirit in the church? "Well, God called me to do this." I'm going to tell you what God called you, God called you to submit to your elders, that's what God called you to do. That's what's clear. Don't play the rook card on me. "Well, God told me. I'm trumping whatever you say." I remember Bob Pittman sitting me down, I had been here for a little while and God was blessing my work here. A lot of people loved me, supported me and encouraged me. He sat me down in no uncertain terms and told me what I was going to do, what I wasn't going to do and I was never going to do anything to hurt this church and on and on he went. I did exactly what he said because he saw I had the capacity if I didn't honor biblical authority and do right to be a divisive person and he's right.

In Acts 16:1-2 the Bible says, "Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek." Now look at verse 2, "and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium." Now, Paul wants an associate pastor, a minister with him, and he hears that the churches give their approval, their blessing to Timothy being a good man called into the ministry and so under the leadership of the churches' approval, the Apostle Paul says, "I want Timothy on my team. I want him to go into missions with me."

Let me go to a few other verses right quick. As a matter of fact, I want you to turn here with me, we're going to fly through here because I'm going to let you go just a little bit early. Acts 6, would you turn there? What I want to emphasize here is we're still talking about pastoral authority and pastoral authority as it relates to biblical church missions. Acts 6:1-6, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation." Isn't that interesting? They want to get the church involved in what they're going to do here. They are calling out some men to the office of deacon so the church must give their approval. "So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.'" Verse 3, "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task." Now, the congregation didn't get to totally make the decision. The pastors are going to make the final decision and qualify what they choose, but the congregation's blessing needs to be on it. Verse 4, "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Then verse 5, "The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch." What I want to point out to you is when God had a plan to put men in the office of leadership, the church gave their approval and blessing. There was not an independent renegade proud spirit. The church said these are the men who qualify and we try to follow that practice here. We are elder led but in the final conclusion of matters, we are congregational rule. We bring all major things to the congregation. Now, certainly if your elders are credible, you would honor and follow their leadership in most things but certainly the congregation has the right to question and look at things.

Now, go to Acts 13. It's very interesting here. I want you to let this meld into your thinking very thoroughly. Acts 13:1-4, "Now there were at Antioch," this is the church at Antioch, "in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." That's the Apostle Paul, of course. Verse 2, "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Now listen, who is to set apart Paul and Barnabas to this mission work? The church. God spoke to the church and the elders of the church that these men ought to be sent out by you to do mission work. These men didn't rise up and tell the church, this is what we're going to do, the church told these men, this is what God is leading you to do. I'm telling you, in evangelical Christianity,

we're upside down on this 95 percent of the time. I mean, there is no respect for the church, the authority and the office of elder in the church.

Verse 3, "Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." The church elders with the church's blessing gave their approval, their blessing, that's laying their hands on them. "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus." So here we go, they're going to various cities and planting churches in each individual city, sent out by the local church.

Now, go to Acts 14. Here we have the Apostle Paul and Barnabas coming back to be accountable to the local church that sent them out to plant churches. Acts 14:7, 27, I'm sorry, "When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples." The church at Antioch sent them out with their blessing and authority. They come back and are accountable to and answer to the local church at Antioch.

Now, go to Acts 15:1-3, "Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'" Here's the context. We're still in Antioch and there are some guys coming around that say, "Wait a minute, we hear Gentiles are being converted and added to the church. We're not sure Gentiles can be converted, first of all, and if they are converted, they've got to become Jews too. They've got to receive the Gospel but also keep the law of Moses so that's a problem."

Verse 2, "And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren," who? "The brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue." So the church at Antioch has got a problem. Gentiles are getting saved, Jewish converts say, "Well, Gentiles can't get saved. If they can't get saved they've got to become Jews first and they've got to add the law of Moses to the Gospel." Paul and Barnabas say, "Wait a minute, you guys are off track." There is a dissension about it. So the local church at Antioch said, "Let's go to the mother local church in Jerusalem and ask them to resolve the conflict." Everything about missions is local church centered. Everything is local church centered.

Go to Acts 15, alright that's where we're at is 15:4 rather, "When they arrived at Jerusalem," this is the local church at Jerusalem, and "they were received by the church," and the church is going to rule in this, "and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them." Now, so this is the group from Antioch. The local church at Antioch sends a group to the local church at Jerusalem saying, "Can you help us solve this problem of these Gentiles getting saved? The Jewish converts want them to become Jews too. We don't think that's right. What do y'all think we ought to do?"

Well, Acts 15:22-23, "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch." So now the local church in Jerusalem says, "We're going to send you guys back to Antioch with the solution and some guys are going to go to you representing our church so you can go talk to your home church, Antioch, and let's get all of this settled and figured out."

Here's my point: every biblical example we have of missions and church planting is under the authority and with the blessing and approval of local churches. If you move to a city and you go somewhere and there's a new church starting, those can be exciting, those can be of God and, by the way, there is a time to plant a church and we are very thorough. We caution our church plants, "Have you investigated thoroughly? Are you sure there's clear foundational doctrinal compromise, if not scandalous sinful issues in the churches that you could attend? If there's not, you need to go there. If you can't find that, then it would be legitimate for you to start a church." And that spirit of high regard for the local church and God's authority in the local church is essential.

Now, we've had so many through the years that have just shown this spirit. I had lunch with Josh P. He and Becky have been members here, I think three years now and Josh feels God calling him to the pastorate. He's very interested in church planting and we went to lunch and he said, "Pastor, I just want you to know I want to be fully and totally committed and submitted to church elders and to Grace Life Church in when I go out, where I go out, how I go out to serve the Lord in this church planting issue."

Matt Fowler. God called Matt to preach. We saw the same kind of disposition, same kind of heart. "What I need to do, how long do I need to do it, whatever you want to do with me, whatever role, I will yield to the pastors and the elders of the church as to what my role is to be here at Grace Life Church or anywhere else."

Chad H., our church planter in Nebraska. The same spirit. "Whatever you guys want to do, however you feel led, I will yield to you." Of course, these men had our enthusiastic blessing to go and do the ministry that they felt the Lord was calling them to do.

You might not have thought about this, Tim Martin, he's been here for 67 years I suppose. Been here as long as I've been here. Tim was just a guy in church here and felt God was leading him to full time ministry. As a matter of fact, I felt God was leading him into full time ministry. Tim has every step of the way all these years, "What you and the elders feel is God's role for me is what I want to do at Grace Life Church." He came out of radio. He's very talented in media, but he also helps us with shepherding and our guys are just great like that.

Leland Johnson, church planter in Chicago. Leland Johnson managed the ?? over in Florence, went to lunch, "Pastor, I think God has called me into the ministry. Give me your guidance. What should I do? How should I do it? Where should I go?" We gave him our blessing if God opened those doors and closed those doors.

Bill Newman, our administrative pastor, a member of the church elders tells me regularly, "Pastor, I'm here to serve as you and the elders see fit, whatever way, whatever capacity God leads me to as long as you feel like God leads me to be here."

Now, we could go on and on and on and, by the way, there have been many through the years who come and say, "I believe the Lord is calling me to do this. I believe the Lord is calling me to do that." And knowing something of their gifts and something of their lives, I have had to tell quite a few, "Brother, I love you. God is using you but I don't think that's where God would have you and I want you to pray more about that." And many of those, some of those are sitting in this room tonight. They love the church, love how they're serving, thankful for that kind of leadership.

Here's the final question: brothers and sisters, do you believe God's word or not? Do you believe it or not? Is God big enough to guide you and keep you in his will if you honor his word and particularly his word as it concerns biblical authority?