

Dorothy Sayers... in one of her writings... was attempting to explain the moral law of God. ... She pointed out that in our society there are two kinds of laws. ... There is the law of the stop sign... and there's the law of the fire. ... The law of the stop sign... is a law that says the traffic is heavy on a certain street... and as a result... the police department or the city council decides to erect a stop sign. ... They also decide that if you run that stop sign... it will cost you \$25 or \$30 or \$35. ... If the traffic changes... they can up the ante. ... That is if too many people are running the stop sign... they can make the fine \$50 or \$75... or if they build a highway around the city... they can take the stop sign down... or reduce the penalty... making it only \$10 if you go through. ... The police department or city council controls the law of the stop sign.

But then she writes... there is also the law of the fire. ...And the law of the fire says... if you put your hand in the fire... you'll get burned.

Now imagine the ridiculous scenario that all of the legislatures... of all the nations... of the entire world... gathered in one great assembly... and they voted unanimously that here on out... fire would no longer burn. ... The first man or woman who left that assembly... and put his or her hand in the fire... would discover that the law of the fire is different than the law of the stop sign. ... Bound up in the nature of fire itself... is the penalty for abusing it. ... So... Dorothy Sayers writes... the moral law of God is like the law of the fire. ... You never break God's laws; you just break yourself on them. ... God can't reduce the penalty... because the penalty for breaking the law is bound up in the law itself.

I would like to propose to you... that the same is true about the character and person of Jesus Christ. ... It really doesn't matter what human opinion holds of Him. He is still God. He still has ultimate authority... whether we recognize it or not.

In our study through Luke's Gospel... we have just seen Jesus present Himself to the nation as their Messiah. Jesus is making a declaration that is as true as the "Law of Fire"... ... It is true whether or not man will recognize it. ... And He has done this... in fulfillment of prophecy... in two ways.

First... was His triumphal entry... when He rode into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey amidst the joyous adulation of the crowds. Zecharia 9:9 prophesied that Messiah would come in this manner.

The second way that He proclaimed Himself to be Messiah according to prophecy... is the way He suddenly appeared in the Temple. Jesus sovereignly took control of the Temple... He did not go through all the proper channels of authority and petitions. He simply entered the Temple and suddenly started throwing over tables of the money changers and shooing-out all the sellers of animals for sacrifice. The High Priest was making a lot of money from scamming the worshipers... making absorbent fortunes... by selling "certified" animals for sacrifice... and the only coinage allowed for the required annual Temple tax. And Christ's angry response to this... was fulfillment of the prophecy found in Malachi 3:1.

This morning... I would like for us to consider the authority Jesus had to act in this manner... as it was challenged by the nation's leaders. And

afterward... we need to consider the implications of His authority over our lives. Is it just a figurative authority...? Are we consistent enough in our own recognition of it...? Do we sometimes identify with it... but most of the time... show an indifference...?

How you view God's authority in your own life is going to determine what God does with you... and what kind of relationship you are going to have with Him... and with other Christians. ... It will determine whether you are a carnal Christian... or a spiritual one. ... It will also determine whether you are on fire for the Lord or a spiritual popsicle.

Jesus' cleansing act allowed Him... for a period of four days... to sit in the temple and teach with marvelous authority. I am positive... that it was not a coincidence... that for four days... Jesus would be examined by the leaders and people... for any flaws or defects in Him or in His teaching. ... You see... every Jewish family at Passover was to live with their Passover lamb for four days of inspection... before it was sacrificed to the Lord. ... Jesus... our ultimate sacrifice... presented Himself to be inspected for four days... before He was sacrificed... and neither the leaders... or the people could find fault with Him.

Jesus taught the people and preached the Gospel. The people were hanging onto every word that He said. As He was speaking... He was interrupted with questions by the chief priests... scribes... and elders. These were the religious "big shots" or aristocracy of the Temple. The custody of the Temple had been entrusted to these people. They had a strong sense of where their authority had come.

But Jesus...? He had no official training. He came from Galilee... (“Can anything good come from Galilee...?”) ... He had never sat under a learned rabbi. ... So just where does His authority come from...? How can He come waltzing into the Temple... and suddenly (and violently) act as though He is in charge...? Why does He act so sovereign...?

Luke 19:45 – 20:8

Jesus' bold behavior... acting as though He thought He was Messiah... would not go unchallenged. ... As soon as the chief priests, scribes, and elders (the principal members of the Sanhedrin) could put their heads together... they swept down on Jesus. ... Specifically... they wanted to know what authority lay behind His triumphal entry... the temple cleansing... and His bold teaching. ... They correctly assumed that no leader of Israel had been consulted about the appropriateness of Jesus' notorious activities... much less had given Him approval. He just suddenly showed up... and started overturning tables... and now here He is these four days teaching the people... at the Temple!

They hoped... therefore... that He would be forced to admit this and would thus begin to be discredited in the eyes of the people.

The motive of their question was not a quest for truth. It stemmed from their bitterness... jealousy... and unbelief. ...No matter what answer Jesus gave to them... it would be unacceptable. ... They were trying to trip up the Lord in order to entrap Him or discredit Him. ... They wanted to push our Lord into a dilemma... so that no matter how He answered... He would be in trouble.

If He said that He had no authority... then He was in trouble with the Jews for invading their temple and acting like a prophet. ... If He said that His authority came from God... then they could more easily appeal to the Roman authorities... who were always on edge at this time of year... and were on the alert to "would-be messiahs" – because Passover season was about being saved from foreign oppression... when it was Egypt. But these Jewish leaders could also levy charges themselves... of blasphemy against Jesus... if He said His authority was from God.

Let's stop here for a second. ... The same tactic of discrediting someone... is still used today... by people that reject Christ and the Bible... because their lifestyle is condemned by God. ... If they oppose you... they will challenge your authority to take a stand against sin.

"...What gives you the right to say that sex without marriage is wrong?"

"Whoa... wait a minute! You have no right to say that homosexuality is a sin..."

But we do have authority. ... Even though it is constantly being challenged... we have the authority of the Bible and the authority of the Gospel that Christ is the only way to Heaven. ... And let me tell you... that this is a FAR greater authority... (with the same nature as the "law of fire") than whatever man's flimsy popular opinion happens to be... today!

Some will challenge the fact there is a Heaven or Hell. ... Their goal is to discredit the messenger and the message. ... But let me say it again... that our authority in condemning sin and preaching how to go to Heaven comes from the Bible. - That's it! ... So what (?) that men scoff and scorn the Scriptures... It still stands!... It is still the truth... whether men want to

accept it or not! ... It is just as Jesus having full authority ... which was not diminished one bit... by these leaders questioning it.

Timothy Keller writes how the Bible offends every culture in the world.

Many of us read a certain passage of Scripture and say, "That's so regressive, so offensive." But we ought to entertain the idea that maybe we feel that way because in *our* particular culture that text is a problem. In other cultures that passage might not come across as regressive or offensive.

Let's look at just one example. In individualistic, Western societies, we read the Bible, and we have a problem with what it says about sex. But then we read what the Bible says about forgiveness—"forgive your enemy;" "forgive your brother seventy times seven;" "turn the other cheek;" "when your enemy asks for your shirt, give him your cloak as well"—and we say, "How wonderful!" It's because we are driven by a culture of guilt. But if you were to go to the Middle East, they would think that what the Bible has to say about sex is pretty good. (Actually, they might feel it's not strict enough!) But when they would read what the Bible says about forgiving your enemies, it would strike them as absolutely crazy. It's because their culture is not an individualistic society like ours. It's more of a shame culture than a guilt culture.

Let me ask you a question: If you're offended by something in the Bible, why should *your* cultural sensibilities trump everybody else's? Why should we get rid of the Bible because it offends your culture?

Let's do a thought experiment for a second. If the Bible really was the revelation of God, and therefore it wasn't the product of any one culture, wouldn't it contradict every culture at some point? Therefore, if it's really from God, wouldn't it have to offend your cultural sensibilities at some point? Therefore when you read the Bible, and you find some part of it outrageous and offensive, that's proof that it's probably true, that it's probably from God. It's not a reason to say the Bible isn't God's Word; it's a reason to say it *is*. What makes you think that because this part or that part of God's Word is offensive, you can forget Christianity altogether?

Now... in turning our thoughts more directly back to our passage this morning... notice how Jesus saw the trap... and with effortless brilliance put a counter-question to them that they dared not answer:

Luke 20:3-6

The problem was... John the Baptist was a popular hero. Vast throngs of people had received his baptism of repentance as they confessed their sins. But the leaders had refused. Earlier in this Gospel, Luke had explained:

Luke 7:29-30 (ESV)

(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)

If they answered that John's baptism had come **from heaven** (with God's authority)... then they would be incriminating themselves for not listening to

John. ... On the other hand... if they rejected John as having any divine authority... and said that his baptism was **merely human**... they would infuriate the crowd. So they remained silent... but their silence spoke volumes.

Because they refused to answer... Jesus said that He too would refuse to answer their question. ... By His silence... Jesus had already answered. *"... You won't say it... so neither will I. But it is the identical answer. My authority is the same as John the Baptist's. ... John... without your certification... was clearly a prophet of God... and I... without your certification... have also been commissioned by God..."*

There was no way these leaders would even consider that Jesus was the Messiah. ... And as to their being sinners — no way! ... So... with Jesus' question hanging heavy... these self-assured... aristocratic know-it-alls became meekly agnostic: "So they answered, 'We don't know where it was from.'"

To these cowardly... spineless "leaders"... Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things".

This was another authoritative slam dunk by "gentle Jesus, meek and mild... .. But Jesus continued... on a roll against Team Sanhedrin. ... Jesus told a parable that revealed the spiritual realities behind His conflict with them. ... The parable indirectly answered their question about His authority... showed them that He knew about their plan to kill Him... and revealed the judgment that awaited them.

Luke 20:9-19

Jesus' story employed an image that everyone readily understood — a vineyard representing Israel. ... Israel thought of itself as the vineyard of God because a number of Old Testament Scriptures make that allusion. (Psalm 80:8-16... Isaiah 27:2-5... Jeremiah 2:21... Ezekiel 19:10-14... and Hosea 10:1. But the most famous is what was named “the Song of the Vineyard.” This extensive passage is found in Isaiah 5:1-7.) ... Isaiah tenderly describes God's loving care for His vineyard... and at the end, Isaiah reveals "*The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.*"

The image of Israel being God's vineyard was so much a part of their national consciousness... that the very temple in which Jesus was standing when He said these words to the leaders... sported a richly carved grapevine... extending very high... up in the air. It was sculpted around the door that led from the porch to the Holy Place. ... The branches... tendrils... and leaves were of finest gold. ... The bunches of grapes hanging upon the golden limbs were costly jewels. ... Herod first placed the golden vine there... and wealthy patriotic Jews... would from time to time... add to its embellishment. ... One might contribute a new jeweled grape... another a leaf... and still another a cluster of the same precious materials. ... This vine had immense sacred meaning in the eyes of the Jews.

So... Jesus would have had everyone's rapt attention... and understanding about the parallel that He was making... as He began the Parable of the Vineyard Keepers. ... The Owner = God the Father... the vineyard = Israel... the care-takers = Israel's leaders... the Owner's servants = the prophets... and the Son = Jesus.

Jesus starts off easy on them... "*A man planted a vineyard, and let it out to tenants and went into a far country for a long time*"... Clearly... the meaning was that God established Israel as his vineyard... put it in charge of spiritual leaders (tenant farmers)... and did not show His presence for a long time.

When Jesus spoke this to the leaders of Israel... God had been silent for 400 years. Malachi was the last prophet of Israel... but it had been 400 years since the last authoritative spokesman for God had communicated with them.

The longer God was gone... or in this case... silent... the more remote and powerless God seemed to them. The leaders (signified by these tenants) began to assume that God's absence was permanent. ... An abusive attitude festered in the leaders... that the vineyard (the Nation Israel) was... in effect... their possession.

Over the course of time... the leaders became more and more abusive with their attitude. Notice the progression of their harshness...

Luke 20:10-12

This triad of beatings summarizes Israel's wretched and uniform treatment of its prophets. ... Elijah was driven into the wilderness by the King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-5). ... Isaiah... according to tradition... was sawn in half... King Joash had Zechariah stoned to death near the altar... killing God's servant and desecrating the Temple without regard (2 Chron. 24:21).... John the Baptist was beheaded... and Stephen...

before he was martyred asked... “which of the prophets of God were not mistreated...?”

God's prophets were such threats to those who treated the vineyard as their own... that God's testifiers to the truth... had to be removed.

Finally... the outrage in the parable peaks to the ultimate violence

Luke 20:13-15a

The land possession rule of that day... was that when an owner dies... if he had not shown an interest in his land for three years... whoever occupied his land at the time of his death... would automatically be considered the new owner. ... This makes sense... then... that when the owner's son shows up... he had to be murdered so the vineyard would be theirs.

Also... the sudden appearance of the son... would have given them the proof they hoped for... that the father was indeed dead... (If he were alive... he would come himself and not send his son.) So... if they killed the son... the vineyard would be theirs.

The bottom line was... that the leadership of Israel was about to go as far as such calloused murder... to maintain their authority.

We must not miss the huge distinction that Jesus made between Himself and the prophets and the religious leaders. The prophets were servants... but He was the Son. ... The leaders were tenants... but He was the heir and joint-owner with the Father.

Their crime would take place within the week... and this parable was Jesus' prophetic autobiography.

The stone that becomes a cornerstone was understood by every Jewish person to be prophetic language - for the Messiah. ... Knowing this... (Verse 17) "But he looked directly at them and asked, 'What then is this that is written: "*The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone*"?' *Common' you know this is true... it is in the Scriptures that you study!*

Jesus' message to His listeners has been that those who will kill the son... will be destroyed by the lord of the vineyard. ... AND - It would be given to others.

The Jewish people **were** severely judged... especially in 70 A.D. ... when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman legion. ... They have continued to suffer even to this day. ... The privileged position and responsibilities that Israel enjoyed... were delegated to the Church.

When the Lord spoke of the judgment to come... the people understood clearly what Jesus meant... and they said, "*May this never happen!*" ... Jesus then looked right at the people and asked them... "*What then is this that is written*" (...*What is your take on this... What do you think this means...*) 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?' Jesus added that everyone that stumbled over this stone will be broken and it will crush anyone that it falls upon.

The stone of course is a picture of Jesus Christ... the foundation and cornerstone of the church. ... He was rejected by His people... but will one day soon... return to establish His kingdom.

Wow! What an answer to the question that they asked Jesus in the courtyard of the Temple that day!!! ... Jesus made these claims about His authority... He told them that He has so much authority... that He is the judgment stone for every person... culture... and nation of all history. ... Whether you get tripped up over this issue of His authority... because some are very offended by it... (thinking “*I am my own boss...*”) OR... if His authority falls on you at the end... the result is the same — *destruction*:

Luke 20:18

Did Team Sanhedrin get the message? ... Oh yes! ... They recognized a spiritual slam dunk when they saw one. ... They understood the allegory... and understood its implications. ... They knew it threatened the life they were enjoying... They understood Jesus' application of some **famous** Old Testament passages.

They got it — but tragically they didn't believe it for a second...

Luke 20:19

Christ's authority cannot be ignored or avoided!

Our attitude toward Jesus is everything. ... We will either fall or rise... depending on how we acknowledge His authority.

Now let me tell you one of the most effective ways that I know... how to acknowledge His authority. Three words: CONFESS EARLY; CONFESS OFTEN.

Every day... the moment you discover a wrong thought... or attitude... or behavior... confess it right away. CONFESS EARLY. ... Now... we all have these through-out the day... don't we...? So... confess often... throughout the day. CONFESS EARLY; CONFESS OFTEN.

Agree with God that He is totally right and you are totally wrong. ... He is your authority. Don't try to bargain with Him... but call on Him as your loving and compassionate Father. ... Then... enjoy the freedom of being totally forgiven and totally cleansed.

Next: Is there a matter of any UN-dealt with sin in your life... that you have been putting off... ignoring the authority of Christ in your life...? Has the Lord placed His finger on a certain area... but you have not given Him the authority in that region...? ... Have you mistakenly thought: *"God has left me alone with it for so long... He doesn't really seem like He wants to be the authority here anymore... Maybe He is not my authority... It has been a while since I felt strong conviction about it..."*

We must come to see that Jesus is the authority in every area of our lives.

Ray Ortlund once wrote: Imagine a big table... leather chairs... coffee... bottled water... and a whiteboard. ... A committee sits around the table - in your heart. ... This committee in your heart... has a social self... a private self... the work self... the sexual self... the recreational self... the religious self... and others. The committee is arguing and debating and voting...

constantly agitated and upset. ... Rarely can they come to a unanimous... wholehearted decision. ... We tell ourselves we're this way because we're so busy with so many responsibilities. ... But the truth is that we're just divided... unfocused... hesitant... and unfree. We departments and their representatives on this board... for all the interests and responsibilities of our life.

One way that some people will recognize Christ's authority is to invite him onto the committee. ... He might even be given a little extra time... on occasion... to present His agenda. Definitely He has a vote. ... But... truthfully... He becomes just one more complication.

But the only way to recognize Christ's authority is to see that "My life isn't working... and to fire all the committee members of my heart... every last one of them. I hand myself over to You, Lord. ... I am your responsibility now. Please run my whole life for me."

What is Jesus to you? Is He just one of your deciding factors...? an impediment...? Or is He your complete authority...?

Are you rising or falling?