

What Is Authority?...

(by Bob Pulliam)

Many people never give any thought to the idea of "authority" in religion. It is actually a very important aspect of serving God. We can see it's mark on every page of the Bible.

Authority is "the power or right to give commands, enforce obedience, take action, or make final decisions; jurisdiction b) the position of one having such power..." (Webster's New World Dictionary, (Simon and Schuster, New York) 1982, p94) The word authority is found several times in the New Testament. It is a translation of the Greek word (*exousia*) meaning, "authority (from the impersonal verb *existi*, "it is lawful"). From the meaning of leave or permission, or liberty of doing as one pleases, it passed to that of the ability or strength with which one is endued, then to that of the power of authority, the right to exercise power,... or... the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others..." (W.E. Vine, p81)

The concept of authority is the idea of having the right to do or say something in the way you are doing or saying it. This concept is not unique to the Bible. Mankind actually lives by the principle of authority. When you get into your car to drive somewhere, you may not think about it, but you are exercising an authority given to you by the state in which you live. Your driver's license gives you the authority to drive a motor vehicle. In sports, rules are set, and a player must play by the rules (do only that for which he has authority). Policemen see that we operate within lawful bounds on the road, and referees see that players operate within lawful bounds on the court (or field of play).

Who determines whether or not we are operating within lawful bounds in religion? That is a topic which will be answered in the next three lessons of this series: Is Authority Necessary, Wrong Sources of Authority, The Correct Source of Authority.