

The Authority of God's Word

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[0:00] Now, I wonder what you think about this statement. Authority in society is a gift from God. Authority in society is a gift from God.

We know in Romans chapter 13 and verse 1 that it says, there is no authority except that which God has established. But while we accept authority, we rarely see it as a gift, do we?

That's particularly true at the moment. Because we've had authorities curtailing our freedoms. We don't like governments telling us what we can or can't do. And then having the police check up on us, questioning while we're sitting on a park bench, walking along the beach.

But stop for a moment and imagine what it would be like if there was no authority. No one to coordinate the rules about social distancing. No one to test and trace those who are COVID positive.

No one at the supermarkets to stop people from hoarding. No one to isolate returning travelers at risk with the virus. No one to test.

[1:12] No one to test. Now we might not like what authorities do to our freedoms until we consider life without authority. And then we realize that it's a gift after all.

A God-given gift. now i'm not just talking about society in general but for every community and organization schools companies clubs whatever they may be authority authorities aren't just established by god they are his gift to us as well which brings us to our passage uh tonight because from here our attention turns from god's care of his people to external threats threats like enemies and the the elements to internal ordering for his people that of governing them so that they might thrive you see it's not just food shelter and protection that we need but healthy relationships too in order for us to survive and to thrive now i intend to focus from verses 13 tonight but let me touch on the first 12 verses quickly as well here we get an update to moses personal personal situation we discover his wives and sons didn't make it to egypt after all but they turned back to his father to his father-in-law's jethro's house now when they returned to meet moses near mount sinai now uh what moses does is tell jethro of god's great salvation uh but it serves as a reminder for us as well where we've been thus far that prior to being god's people god had to rescue israel we also reminded that as great as a leader moses was he too needed rescue of his own that's why his son eliezer named uh in verse 4 is explained to us as this god was my helper he saved me from the sword of pharaoh so god saves moses and then uses him to save his people israel but now um once god's track record of uh being savior is proven our tension turns to internal threats how to order god's people so that they will thrive and survive as his people so verse 13 uh when jethro arrives this is what we read the next day moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people and they stood around him from morning till night when his father-in-law saw all that moses was doing for the people he said what is this you're doing for the people why do you alone sit as judge while all these people stand around you from morning to evening moses answered him because the people came to me to seek god's will whenever they have a dispute it is brought to me and i decide between the parties and inform them of god's decrees and instruction and now have you ever wondered what the disputes might have been as nomads with no land i don't think it's uh over fencing disputes perhaps someone's donkey ate another person's hay maybe that's what they're fighting about or perhaps someone thinks his neighbor's tent is pitched too close to theirs but whatever we think it is i think we need to give them some credit because they actually came to moses to seek out god's will now if you remember back at the very start of exodus back in egypt when moses first tried to resolve a dispute remember what happened then he was threatened wasn't he they said to him who made you ruler and judge over us well now however not only were they allowing him to be judged but more importantly they were seeking god's will through him and so my first point today is this which is on the slide israel's ultimate authority is god's word

it may seem that they are looking to moses himself but in fact it's god's will that they seek and they see they can see that moses is the one that has access to god moses in turn in verse 16 is fully aware that when he hands down decisions it's god's decrees and instructions he is imparting it's not his own word but god's that he's pronouncing which is why i think moses initially does it alone it's not so much that he thinks he's so great and no one else can do it rather just that god had told him at the burning bush god's plan was to speak to moses and moses to speak to the people sometimes aaron steps in to do that on his behalf but apart from that god had not declared that he would speak through any other but now with israel as a nation in their own right this was no longer sustainable and so even as god's word remains israel's ultimate authority they need to find a way to make it work properly to function as a nation so along come jeshoe jeshoe who's not a hebrew and he has some insights verse 17 which on the next slide moses father-in-law replied what you're doing is not good you and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out the work is too heavy for you you cannot handle it alone listen now to me and i will give you some advice and may god be with you well let me pause here and just say that jethro is most often referred to as moses's father-in-law only in verse one is he spoken of as a priest of midian in other words he's not speaking here with any official authority he's doing it as a kind father-in-law giving good advice to his son-in-law that's evident from his tone he makes comments like may god be with you in this meaning god has the final say and yet jethro still speaks with some authority it's the kind of authority that comes with wisdom there's a certain weight to his words because it just makes good sense traditionally we call this general revelation truth and wisdom that comes from observing and understanding nature human nature it's general because god makes it accessible to all humans it's still god's wisdom but god is not stingy with it and he gives it to humans all humans the opportunity to acquire it through wisdom through experience through tradition and that's why i think if you look across the world and across cultures we see this sort of commonly held wisdom revealed to all not just specifically to israel on the other hand special revelation is something god only gives to israel and here only through moses and so jethro now a god fearer because if you look back in verse 11 he acknowledges the lord to be greater than all gods he says to moses here in verse 19 you must be the people's representative before god you're still god's spokesman he says and they bring their disputes to him in other words jethro recognizes moses unique role as prophet and messenger of god's specific or special revelation in all likelihood jethro may have even heard the story when moses encountered god at the burning bush many years back and so while jethro may have some wisdom to offer moses has god's specific decrees and instructions for israel and so in verse 20 jethro continues

teach them his decrees and instructions and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave jethro's advice to moses then is that he shouldn't just exercise god's authority as judge but he's also to do it by teaching them his word i remember what i said in point one it's uh if israel's ultimate authority is god's word then it's important that they are taught god's word now some of this anticipate what's to come in the next few chapters because uh in chapter 20 god gives them the ten commandments there moses goes up to mount sinai to receive the law and then we have more specific laws that follow after that just jethro's advice here then preempts this development moreover the more people understand and live by god's word then the less disputes there will be don't you think and then finally jethro advises moses in verse 21 uh on the slide but select capable men from all the people men who fear god trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain and appoint them as officials over thousands hundreds fifties and tens have them serve as judges for the people at all times but have them bring every difficult case to you the simple cases they can decide themselves that will make your lord lighter because they will share it with you if you do this and god so commands you will be able to stand the strain and all these people will go home satisfied now you don't have to be a legal expert to see that what jethro proposes here is rather similar to our own system in fact i'd say many countries in the world have this same system it's simply a system of delegated authority and there's no rocket science to this and as i said earlier the reason moses failed to do it himself wasn't because he was dumb or hung power hungry but because of the high view that he had for god's word and its authority among the people he couldn't simply just let anyone else speak on behalf of god because god hadn't authorized them to do so and the consequence of allowing that would have been done god would have come down harshly on him and on his people but here jethro gives him the advice that if moses taught them god's word the word that moses himself will receive from god and give to them so god would still be speaking through moses then these people can judge based on that word and when the judgments were

made it is still god's word that is the ultimate authority so now the work of being able to apply that word word can be spread out to more people because there are capable men who know the law that can apply it which is why in verse 21 the qualifications for these men matter they had to fear god in order to apply it well they also had to be trustworthy that is not susceptible to bribery that's what dishonest gain is why because the end goal in verse 23 is people need to go home satisfied justice isn't just done it has to be seen to be done you see if the application of the law was clear-cut then there wouldn't be dispute would there so if cases came before a judge it was because the law was strictly to apply judgment was required not just judging but judgment making judgment when you apply the law and so when that's required it needs to be done impartially so that if people didn't like the even if they didn't like the outcome they'll still go away and be satisfied because it was fair now of course the system is set up so so that if some of it it was beyond the ability of the lower officials then it could be escalated up all the way to moose and so the main point with this latter part of the passages on the slide that while god's word is still the ultimate authority god exercises his authority through trustworthy humans initially it was through moose but then with jethro's advice this is widened to other trustworthy humans as well now for a long while i thought that the main point of this passage was about the importance of delegation in governing here i was thinking god is teaching us the basics of organizational theory the management by delegation no need to go to harvard for an mba god's got it right here in exodus but then i thought really is that all i mean sure we can garner that that sort of wisdom from this passage but as i said earlier that's just common sense isn't it it's general revelation it doesn't take special revelation for us to know this so there's got to be more surely to this passage well i think there is and it's the points that i've already been making and that is authority is god's gift to us and for us as god's people that ultimate authority is found in his word that's god's gift to us as his people for us to live by and to thrive as a result as moose is on the verge of receiving this gift on the top of mount sinai the purpose of this chapter is that we're being told that god thinks this is so important this gift that he's giving to his people is so important and crucial that he puts structures in place to help them to learn it to understand it and then to live by it and so the main point of this passage isn't so much the structure as an end in itself it's not about the teaching or the delegating good things as they are but it's about what's being taught and delegated that's the main point it's the authority of god's word that is the main point i think so important is it that god puts in place this system to ensure that people are able to live by it and be subject to it you see other organizations apply these same structures don't they there's nothing spectacular in one sense about what moose is doing if you look around at companies and organizations and you know clubs or whatever they all do these same things except for them the goal is probably to sell more product or to provide better services whereas for israel their prize their goal is god's word that's the invaluable gift that they are being entrusted which they are to live by which they will be blessed if they do now as christians we can take this one more step can't we because for us god's word now comes to us through christ and that's point three god's authority is now fully vested in christ we don't get it from this passage of course but in this last point i want to show how in the new testament jesus picks up on this idea of authority god's word teaching and delegation and applies it to us today as his disciples so the first is in our old new testament reading for today it was actually our easter sunday passage but in the great commission jesus said that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him and as a result what's his command

[17 : 33] we are to make disciples of all nations how by teaching them to obey everything i've commanded do you see the similarities there with exodus 18 the difference being god is no longer speaking through moose but jesus of course but all authority is now with jesus jesus not moose is now the ultimate judge isn't he over heaven and earth but what hasn't changed is that we're still being taught to obey god's word and of course paul reiterates this in 2nd timothy chapter 2 verse 2 which is on the next slide paul says and the things you have heard from me say in the presence of many witnesses things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses and trust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others again see the parallels with exodus 18 reliable and qualified people entrusted to teach others of course while moose was merely god's messenger in exodus jesus is more he not only reveals god's word he is god himself in fact he's the fulfillment of god's word as we know and so jesus speaks with his own divine authority even as he speaks is what his father commands as well further he reveals god not just with his words but in his very person that's why in the next on the next slide the next verse john can say in the prologue for the law was given through moose exodus grace and truth came through jesus christ in jesus we see

the very character of god which up to now has been reflected in god's laws and decrees but in another sense the emphasis and focus of exodus chapter 18 hasn't changed has it the goal for us as his disciples is still to live under god's word is still to teach god's word to all disciples so that we can live by it and the effective way of doing it is still to entrust this task to faithful and reliable people to teach others and so i have to say that really clarifies our work here at hdd and st john's doesn't it whether it's kids church which michelle and jen lead with their leaders whether it's hdy with jeff and his leaders whether it's our growth groups the focus is on teaching god's word it's the same with our outreach ministries god's word is what we want to share with others and of course when we talk about god's word the ultimate aim is that people through his word will come to know jesus his son hear the gospel the good news that whoever believes in jesus will be saved but unlike israel as a church we're not an earthly kingdom are we we are a part of a spiritual kingdom and so when we appoint reliable people they no longer sit as judges over others rather their job is to teach the word jesus is now the judge and his spirit is now the one that judges us and convicts us in our hearts but our job is to teach the word so that we can help others to apply it with the help of god's spirit and so that's the other focus for us to train capable people to teach god's word so that everyone without exception will have the help they need to apply his word so let me conclude then by giving you a chance to just reflect on these things personally and to see if you can apply it to your own lives and so i've got two questions to help us to do

that first which is on your screen where do we stand with god's word do we live in submission to its authority of course i know that none of us are perfect we still fall short but there should be a commitment shouldn't it a true desire to live under his word a recognition that is our ultimate authority in life in the area of our sexual purity in our financial integrity in the way we treat others our family members our parents our colleagues do we yield to what god commands in his word those of us who are studying the sermon on the mount presently the young adults growth groups it's like asking ourselves whether our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees whether we obey the spirit of the law of god's word rather than just the letter so why don't i give you a minute as you think about that and maybe you want to write a few things down in your diaries or whatever something that you can reflect on and work on and pray on for the coming week now as for the second application again on the slide for those of us who do commit to live in submission to god's word then what part do we also play in helping others to know and live by god's word i want to say that for those of us who are already doing this then let me affirm you in what you're doing you are doing what god wants of you keep at it faithfully take great encouragement to keep going even when it's difficult his desire though is that you continue to prove yourself trustworthy that is to teach his word faithfully help others to apply it correctly and it doesn't matter where or how you do it it could be to kids in kinder at kids church or maybe only a small group of two or three people you might not even be the official leader of the group but as long as you're helping people to understand god's word and thereby to help them put it into practice then you're helping them to live under god's authority you're actually blessing them allowing for god to bless them with the gift of the authority of his word the most precious gift that god can give to us in christ so again let me pause and allow you to reflect again consider perhaps if there's more you could do in this area or more effectively or intentionally and then maybe pray for god to help you to make you trustworthy reliable and capable and then once we're done i will close us in prayer well let us pray father just as israel had your laws decrees and instructions to live by so we are thankful that you have given us your word so that we may live by it more than that we are thankful that you have given us the spirit of your son who teaches us and leads us so that we have the power to obey you help us as disciples of your son to obey his commands and help us to teach one another to do the same in jesus name we pray amen amen you to do we a dell