

The Authority of Jesus Christ

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

Authority is a concept known to some degree by every responsible person. By most it is appreciated, for without it society would be chaotic. Others detest it, and refuse to live by it. The world's prisons are full of such rebels.

"Authority" is a major biblical theme. The most popular Greek word for "authority" is *exousia* (sometimes translated as "power"). This term, with a variety of usages, is found some 102 times in the New Testament.

Authority is attributed to God the Father; it is resident in his very nature. Authority alludes to Deity's right to command and enforce obedience.

What is less recognized in some segments of universal religion, however, is the authority of Jesus Christ. The authority of the Lord Jesus may be studied from various vantage points, e.g., his eternal authority before the universe existed, his incarnate authority as God's Son in the present order of things, and his authority as it will be after this material world has been obliterated.

From the nature of the case, this present study will have to be somewhat limited.

Christ's Authority as Creator

One aspect of Christ that is not appreciated, even by many Christians, is his role in the original creation. In the opening lines of Scripture, Moses declared that: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The Hebrew term for "God" is a plural form (also v. 26 – "us" and "our"; cf. 3:22).

This is the first biblical hint of the triune Deity, known in the New Testament as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, John declares that the eternal Word became flesh, and: "All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that has been made" (Jn. 1:1, cf. v. 14).

Paul likewise alludes to Jesus' role as Creator (Col. 1:16; cf. 1 Cor. 8:6b), as does the writer of Hebrews (cf. Heb. 1:2b).

Christ the Sustainer

In addition to the Lord's creative capacity, he is involved in sustaining the present order of the created universe.

Paul contended that it is by the authority of Christ that "all things hold together" (Col. 1:17, ESV). Further, Jesus, in connection with his creation role, is said to "uphold all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3).

Were it not for the sustaining authority of the Son of God, our universe would come apart at the seams!

Christ's Incarnate Authority

In discussing the authority of Jesus during his earthly sojourn, it is important to understand something of the nature of Christ's in-the-flesh existence.

Though he maintained his full divine nature as the Son of God, for the love of others he made the decision to not "grasp" (hold on to) his status of "equality" with the Father (in the matter of authority). Instead, he "emptied himself" (a voluntary act at a definite point in time) of his sovereign independence, assuming the role of a "servant" (literally a "slave") (Phil. 2:5-10).

His exercise of authority, therefore, was subservient to, and consistent with, that of his Father's (cf. Jn. 5:30; 6:38). This is what the Lord had in mind when he spoke of the "authority" that was "given to" him by the Father (Jn. 17:2).

His divine authority "in the days of his flesh" (Heb. 5:7) is important to understand as we engage this study. From this vantage point, let us reflect upon various uses of his authority as "the Son of man."

Conditions of Nature

Jesus was able to exercise supernatural authority over the forces of nature.

When the Lord was in a boat with his disciples on the Sea of Galilee, a storm “came down” upon that body of water (695 feet below sea level—an environment facilitating violent weather). The waves were crashing over the vessel, covering it, and it began to be filled with water. The disciples, though experienced fishermen, were terrified. They awoke the Lord, who was asleep in the stern, and cried out for his help.

Christ “rebuked” both the wind and the sea, and immediately the wind ceased, and there was a “great calm” upon the water (Mt. 8:23ff; Mk. 4:35ff; Lk. 8:22ff). The verbal forms denote an instant state of being. A. T. Robertson noted that ordinarily a sudden drop in wind does not create an immediate calm of the water (I.69).

When entering Jerusalem a few days before his death, Christ and his disciples came to a fig tree at the roadside. It was leafed out, but had no fruit; this was strange since fig trees bore the fruit first, then came the leaves.

The Lord saw this as an opportunity to rebuke the Hebrew populous. Spiritually speaking, the corrupt nation feigned the appearance of productivity but was barren—even on the verge of murdering the Messiah. Christ thus spoke to the tree saying, “Be without fruit forever more.” Instantly the tree withered away, beginning from the roots (Mk. 11:12-14).

Jesus’ authority, even over nature, was phenomenal.

Living Creatures

The authority of the Lord was evidenced by his total control of living creatures.

When Christ and his disciples were at Capernaum, those who collected the temple tax inquired of Peter as to whether his teacher (Jesus) paid that tax. The apostle replied affirmatively.

Later, however, Jesus made an important point to the apostle. A son was exempt from paying taxes to his father; as the Son of God, therefore, the Lord was free from the temple tax.

Nonetheless, to avoid causing others to stumble, he instructed the apostle to cast a hook into the Sea of Galilee; the first fish caught would have a coin in its mouth sufficient for the tax covering both Christ and Peter. The Lord brought a specially prepared creature to the apostle’s hook.

As Jesus prepared to enter Jerusalem on that Sunday before his crucifixion on Friday, he dispatched two disciples to enter the community of Bethphage. There they would find a donkey and her colt. They were to bring these animals to Christ. The colt had not been broken for riding (Mk. 11:2), but garments were placed on the animal’s back, and without incident, the Lord rode the docile creature into Jerusalem.

If we may be permitted to express a thought figuratively, a yielding dumb beast had more “sense” on this occasion, than those who would be screaming, “Crucify him!” within a matter of days.

The point being made is the authority of Christ over the creatures he made.

Sickness

There are no fewer than nineteen specific cases of miraculous healing performed by Jesus in the three and one half years of his ministry.

Modern medical specialists struggle with overcoming a wide variety of ailments that plague the human body. It takes medications, surgical procedures, the healing properties of time, etc., to effect the temporal cures that we so cherish as slowly-dying human beings.

The healing miracles of Jesus involved of a wide variety of ailments, e.g., leprosy (Mt. 8:2ff), congenital blindness (Jn. 9:1ff), restoration of a severed ear (Lk. 22:50-51), deafness and impediment of speech (Mk. 7:32ff), etc.

In this connection it is appropriate to mention that one aspect of the Savior’s miracles was to **establish his authority**.

At Capernaum the Lord encountered a man afflicted with palsy, who had been brought to Christ on a stretcher by four friends. Seeing their faith being demonstrated, Jesus said to the crippled man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Who would dare to authoritatively claim to pardon someone of his sins? Only God has that prerogative.

The Lord thus explained his supernatural act.

“That you may know that the Son of man possesses authority on earth to forgive sins (he said to the sick of palsy), I say to you, Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house” (Mk. 2:10).

The miracles of Jesus authenticated his claim of being God’s unique Son.

Death

There were three cases during Christ’s ministry when he raised people from the dead—the daughter of Jairus (Mt. 9:18-26; Mk. 5:21-43), a widow’s son (Lk. 7:11-15), and Lazarus of Bethany (Jn. 11:43-44).

In addition, there is the subtle suggestion that in some way, the Lord was instrumental as well in the resurrection of his own body (cf. Jn. 2:19).

The credentials for the Savior’s authority are impressively increasing.

Demons

Demons (not “devils” KJV) were evil spirits (Mt. 12:43-45) under the control of Satan. These were permitted to inhabit the bodies of some people during the earthly days of Christ and his apostles.

Almost certainly this was for the purpose of allowing the Savior and his men the opportunity of demonstrating the superiority of Christ’s authority over Satan (see Mt. 12:28-29; Lk. 10:17-18; 1 Jn. 4:4).

The New Testament clearly indicates that demons were under the ultimate control of the Savior. Demons tormented a man who lived in the country of the Gerasenes. When Christ expelled the evil spirits from the unfortunate man, the demons asked the Lord’s permission to enter a herd of swine nearby. Even they acknowledged the Messiah’s authority (Mk. 5:6-7).

Since they did, where does that place those today who refuse to acknowledge his authority?

Angels

The English “angel” is an anglicized form of the Greek *aggelos* (pronounced ä’n-ge-los). The term signifies a “messenger.” *Aggelos* is used in several ways in the Scriptures. It most commonly denotes a heavenly order of created beings (Psa. 148:2, 5), who are “spirits” as to their nature, and who carry out the will of God on behalf of his people (Heb. 1:14).

A consideration of the New Testament evidence reflects the fact that Christ exercises authority over these heavenly beings. In speaking of the coming day of judgment, Jesus himself declared:

“The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity” (Mt. 13:41).

Since the Lord exercises authority over angels, what does that say about his authority over those who are “a little lower than the angels”?

Christ and the Law of Moses

One of the most prominent errors in the community of “Christendom,” is a failure to properly distinguish between the purpose of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. Many wander back and forth between the Old and New Testaments, without a clue as to the difference between the “first” and “second” of these covenants (cf. Heb. 8:7; 10:9).

John the apostle wrote: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17). The “law of Moses” was also called the “law of God”; ultimately it was from God though given through Moses (cf. Neh. 8:1, 8).

However, that law was never designed to be a permanently binding legal document. It was preparatory to the coming of the new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31ff). But can we imagine someone citing that law, and then saying: “You have heard that it was said,” appealing then to that law, but subsequently adding, “but I say unto you....”

Who, but an authoritatively endowed person, would dare to be so bold. Yet that was precisely the thrust of the Lord’s message in that illustrious “sermon on the mount” (cf. Mt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44).

Little wonder, then, that at the conclusion of that discourse, “the multitudes were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (7:28-29).

Christ’s Authority Prophesied

The authority of Christ was generously previewed in the Old Testament.

- The Savior’s regal authority was foreshadowed in the famous “scepter” prophecy of Genesis 49:10.
- The kingly image was continued in Samuel’s affirmation of the coming Christ (2 Sam. 7:12-13).
- It was expanded by David (Psa. 2:1ff). (d) Isaiah announced it (9:6).
- Jeremiah did as well (33:15-16).
- Zechariah likewise followed with an announcement of the priestly king (6:12-13).

The Lord Jesus himself certainly had his authoritative reign in view when he spoke of a “certain nobleman” who went into a far country (heaven), to receive for himself a kingdom.

Some repudiated his authoritative administration, however, and these were depicted as his “enemies.” Consequently their punishment was deadly and eternal (Lk. 19:12-14; 27; cf. also Rev. 19:11-16).

Christ’s Authority Via Scripture

The practice of publishing the New Testament with the words of Jesus in red type, however well-meaning, is misguided. The reason being, it leaves the impression with many that the words spoken by Christ are more important than the messages spoken and written by other inspired persons. This is an erroneous conclusion.

As Christ taught during his personal ministry, he emphatically declared that the messages of his inspired representatives would carry the same weight as his own declarations.

For example, the Savior said regarding those whom he had dispatched with his authority.

“He who listens to you, is listening to me; and he who rejects you is rejecting me; and he who rejects me is rejecting him who sent me” (Lk. 10:16).

On the evening of the last supper, just before his impending arrest, Christ repeatedly emphasized that after his departure his disciples would be empowered by the Holy Spirit. In connection with that endowment, Jesus promised: “I come unto you” (cf. Jn. 14:16-18).

He pledged that their messages would be those of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (14: 26), and would likewise represent him. He declared that in their teaching they would be guided by the Spirit into all the truth (Jn. 16:13).

On numerous occasions Christ declared that the disciples' future instruction was by his authority (Mt. 10:19-20; Mk. 13:1-4; Lk. 12:11-12). The apostle Paul most emphatically declared: "...the things I write unto you ... they are the commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37b). He frequently undergirded his teaching with the affirmation he was speaking on behalf of Christ (1 Thes. 4:2, 15; 2 Thes. 3:6, 12). He declared that his inspired teaching was backed by the same authority as that of his Lord (1 Cor. 7:10,12). We absolutely must recognize that the authority of the Son of God is resident in the inspired instruction of the New Testament.

Authority Relinquished

Before concluding this discussion regarding the "authority" of Christ, we are inclined to call attention to perhaps the most profoundly puzzling thought on this matter that it is possible for the human mind to contemplate. The apostle Paul penned the following:

"Then cometh the end when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till, he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For, He put all things in subjection under his feet. But when he saith, All things are put in subjection, it is evident that he is excepted who did subject all things unto him. And when all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28, ASV).

Scholars are somewhat divided on the precise significance of the phrase that affirms Christ's authoritative role will be surrendered to God the Father.

The passage appears to declare that when Christ returns, at the conclusion of earth's history, the authority he had exercised during the Christian dispensation will somehow be fully assumed by the Father, with the Son being submissive to him. I have explored this matter in some depth in my article, [A Breathtaking View of the Love of Christ](#).

It will be sufficient to say at this point that this self-surrender of his kingdom-authority will in no way reflect a forfeiture of his deity or divine glory.

Whatever else it suggests, it does seem to indicate that in some fashion our blessed Savior has chosen to be eternally identified with us as a "brother" (cf. Rom. 8:17; Heb. 2:9-12).

And in some unfathomable way we will be privileged to "reign with him" as a spiritual kinsman (Rev. 3:21; 22:5b).

Conclusion

The authority of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a prevailing and engaging theme within the sacred Scriptures. To ignore it has eternal and devastating consequences.

Every rational, sincere soul should joyfully enter Christ's kingdom by means of the new birth process (Jn. 3:3-5), and happily and fervently serve him as king for as long as they live.

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Works Cited

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Scripture References

Genesis 1:1; John 1:1; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3; Philippians 2:5-10; John 5:30, 6:38; John 17:2; Hebrews 5:7; Matthew 8:23; Mark 4:35; Luke 8:22; Mark 11:12-14; Mark 11:2; Matthew 8:2; John 9:1; Luke 22:50-51; Mark 7:32; Mark 2:10; Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 7:11-15; John 11:43-44; John 2:19; Matthew 12:43-45; Matthew 12:28-29; Luke 10:17-18; 1 John 4:4; Mark 5:6-7; Psalm 148:2, 5; Hebrews 1:14; Matthew 13:41; Hebrews 8:7, 10:9; John 1:17; Nehemiah 8:1, 8; Jeremiah 31:31; Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Psalm 2:1; Luke 19:12-14, 27; Revelation 19:11-16; Luke 10:16; John 14:16-18; John 16:13; Matthew 10:19-20; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 12:11-12; 1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 Thessalonians 4:2, 15; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 12; 1 Corinthians 7:10, 12; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Romans 8:17; Hebrews 2:9-12; Revelation 3:21, 22:5; John 3:3-5

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