

## Vital Supplement for Spiritual Vitality

### ACCEPTING GOD'S AUTHORITY OVER OUR LIVES:

Do we truly serve God on His terms? If not, why?

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When terrible pain, problems, and tragedies come our way, some of us may find ourselves wondering if not crying out, whether privately or publicly, from the depths of our souls, *“God, are you here? Why are you allowing this to happen to happen to me? Do you not love me? Do you not want me to be happy?”* Sadly, some of us become immobilized by tragedy, unable to go beyond our pain to embrace present opportunities.

Other times God calls us to a certain task that may be disheartening or frightening. For some, God's invitation requires a reduction in comforts, income, or size/location of home. Coupled with our love for familiar securities, the disadvantages of positively responding to this new opportunity, overshadows enriching possibilities. We view God's invitation as a set-back to personal progress. Thus, we reject this God-given opportunity, *rationalizing* our decisions with *“religious excuses”* such as the *“need to support a growing family,”* *“a lack of “internal peace,”* or *“personal conviction from the Lord.”* Like some of the characters in the Bible, we fail to trust God. Like Ahaz, we place our trust in ourselves or in others.

For others, this calling from the Lord may seem radical. Perhaps it is leaving our familiar relationships, surroundings, and habituated way of life for a place that is unfamiliar, intimidating, and hostile to everything you are and possess. The faces are new, the customs are foreign, and the beliefs are strange. Certain comforts we took for granted and easy access to goods have been replaced with giant obstacles. Thus, in a distant land we find ourselves experiencing deprivation, loneliness, and misfortune. For some, the expectations we possess shatter. Perhaps the weight of all these difficulties is too much to bear or our expectations were unrealistic in the first place. So, what do we do? After trying to work it out all on our own terms, we cry out to God in exhaustion. We wait and seem to receive no response. Relief appears to be nowhere in sight.

But for many of us, God has not called us to unfamiliar lands. Instead, in familiar places God calls us to a distinctive task. In the highways and byways of living life, God commands His people to a different way of life, a life that is alien to those in our midst (1 Peter). Unfortunately, like a herd

of zebras, we prefer to blend in with our surroundings than to make it our singular ambition to please Him in the choices we make, the pleasures we pursue, and the precepts we promote. Yet, we moan and groan with unhappiness. We keep reminding ourselves that the future is bright; something “good” is going to come our way. But then we look over and we see this weathered person, whose chronic negative and miserable disposition is horrifying to us, and we ask ourselves *“Is ‘this’ my plight in life? Is this all there is...a colorless, mundane life?”* *Is this what I was made for?”* Thus, a mid-life crisis finds perennial expression, reoccurring like the four seasons. We long for something different, but do not have the resolve or will to change. Thus, we remain indistinct among the zebra-like herd. The irony of it all is that we are discontent but comfortable.

What is the bottom line? At some level we struggle with God's authority over our lives. To be sure, our lives are marked by pain, invitations, and habituations. But how we respond to God's authority, reveals a lot about who we are and what we really believe. When tragedy hits us, we question God and are skeptical about what God is doing. It is as if we place God on trial. When God calls us to a certain task and we do not respond to it in a manner that truly honors Him, we displace His authority over our lives. When we do not give our very best in the details of daily living, no matter how repetitive or small our job or task is before the eyes of those who are popular, powerful, or prestigious, we neglect to offer the proper respect that is due Him. Nevertheless, we are called, commanded, and commissioned to make every aspect of our lives an expression of worship - no matter how ridiculous our behavior and choices seem before others.

When Jesus entered into Jerusalem (the Triumphal Entry) the religious leaders should have accepted His authority. Instead, they tested, tried, humiliated, and crucified Him. Even though Jesus reveals in Matthew 21:1-22 that they were spiritually blind, inwardly corrupt, and outwardly fruitless, they were a nation formed and chosen by God to be fruitful (Matt. 21:23-22:14). Their faith is rooted in actual history. Their past is replete with divine deliverance, miracles, revelation, and prophecies, and yet these religious leaders refused to accept the authority of the One who entered into their midst. Jesus is God!

Yet, are we so different? Even though we can remember our conversion, reflect upon how God has taken care of us when tired, torn, and troubled, and bear testimony to His continual goodness and patience, why do we continue to choose to serve God on our own terms? We refuse to accept the authority of Jesus over lives.

### **We fail to accept God's authority over our lives when...**

1. We question God's authority with skepticism or cynicism.
2. We look to other authorities as substitutes to God's authority.
3. We ignore His authority as if we never received His message (e.g., the Great Commission).
4. We willfully occupy ourselves with other matters in order to avoid His invitation, command, or precept.
4. We try to usurp His authority by executing our own plans & programs.
5. We dread (unhealthy angst) or mock His authority.
6. We think about His authority even though we choose to act as we deem appropriate.
7. We actively rebel against His authority.
8. We develop a stubborn attitude about His authority.
9. We are totally apathetic about His authority.
10. We are selective in what we precepts we choose to obey.
11. We are hoping God will overlook our small acts of rebellion in daily living, believing that are selective acts of rebellion are insignificant and tolerable.
12. We willfully obey His authority even though our deep-seated affections are not harmony with our volition.

On the other hand, we submit to His authority when we accept His authority over our lives. I am defining "accept" as "coming to terms with *who God is*." If we can really come to terms with the biblical truth that God is the sum-total of His infinite persons, realizing, for example, that God is both good and sovereign, then we will positively respond to His authority, no matter the difficulty of the invitation or the precept. Our disposition will

be one of worship. As Elizabeth Elliot once said to Dallas Theological Seminary student wives, "You are to bloom where you are planted."

All too often our situations or experiences oscillate between stability and instability. But God Himself, who is both infinite and personal, does not change. When those times become so difficult that God seems foreign to us, when He calls us to a certain task, or when obedience to all His precepts becomes difficult or embarrassing, study the character and choices of Jesus Christ. In fact, when I consider God's mysterious ways, I often find myself pondering and reflecting upon the words and works of Jesus Christ.

### **Thus, when we presuppose the perfections of God the Father and the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ as my Supreme Authority, we are able to...**

1. **Trust in God** no matter if our questions are never answered. God has our best interests at heart and sees all things. Since God is sovereign, He is working out all things according to His good, loving, and perfect divine will for all involved.
2. **Harmonize personal desires and actions** in robust acts of obedience because of the One we are trusting. Once again, God has our best interests at heart even if we do not understand what God is doing. So, serving Him can become a joy no matter how difficult the invitation, task, or commandment is set before us.
3. **View God's precepts as a source of inspiration and an activity of delight** because God knows and cares for us. The God of the universe is personally involved in our lives!
4. **Pursue our activities** (no matter how laborious, repetitive, or intense) **with intellectual and moral excellence** because He is the Source and Sustainer; He is our joy and delight.
5. **Rely upon God regardless of the nature or cost of His invitation.** Once again, God will take care of us. Like Moses, crossing the wilderness, we are called to place our complete trust Him.

In conclusion, let us reflect upon the salient words of the late Dr. W.H. Griffith Thomas. He writes:

Receiving everything from Christ. Seeing everything in Christ. Doing everything for Christ. This is life in its simplicity, sufficiency, and satisfaction. This is ministry in peace, power, and progress. Away from this is unrest, dissatisfaction, emptiness, weariness, powerlessness. Apart from this is disappointment, depression, discontent, despondency, and despair. But when Christ is our life, ministry becomes a privilege, a joy, a delight; an ever-deepening experience, an ever-heightening glory to God. So let us sum up all by saying that for life and ministry Christ is always necessary, Christ is always available, Christ is always sufficient.