

## Religious Liberty: A Question of Authority

*By: Michael Farris*

Greetings brothers and sisters. I have prepared this message with much prayer and study. It's my hope that at the conclusion of this message you will be galvanized to search the Scriptures with a renewed zeal and a greater confidence in God's word over the esteemed opinions of men. Any time one sets out to discuss religious freedom the story of Peter and John in Acts 3, 4, and 5 becomes a key text. This story is pregnant with meaning and is fitting for our subject today. Looking at this formative time we find Peter and John mature and strong. They spent over three years with the Lord. They had seen His miracles. They had listened to His teachings. And they had their hopes dashed only to see the Lord resurrected from the dead. Now with renewed zeal and confidence they carry on the mission to preach the last-day message to the world... starting in Judea. Christ meant everything to these men. They had already surrendered their employment, the comforts of home, and risked their lives preaching unpopular truths in a context which crucified their beloved teacher and Savior. Undaunted in the face of an evil union between the Roman Government and intolerant Jewish religious leaders, these men committed their whole lives to God. As such in Acts 4:7 we find Peter and John being arrested and questioned about what "power" and "name" they restored the man who was born lame. Keep in mind this man was a well-known beggar, spending his whole life before the gates at Jerusalem asking for alms. In other words, their question regarding authority was no idle question of curiosity. The leadership at Jerusalem knew the answer. After all... these are the wicked leaders who crucified our Lord, ignored the preaching of John the Baptist, and bribed Roman soldiers to lie about the resurrection of Christ. They knew full-well who Jesus was and what Peter and John had done through the name of Jesus. They weren't looking for answers. No, they were looking to intimidate Peter and John. This is why they were brought before the Sanhedrin as recorded in Acts 4. The religious political union of Judaism and the state stood poised with blood on its hands to silence these two humble fishermen from Galilee... But the man who denied Jesus three times and the other (John) who fled in terror into the woods after the capture of Jesus now stood unafraid in Jesus name. Peter and John stood imbued with the "Holy Spirit" and waxed bold, indicting the religious leaders in Jerusalem for their political-religious union in the death of the messiah. They boldly lifted up the name of Jesus as the only "name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 NKJV).

Peter and John knew who the real **authority** was in both heaven and earth, and it was not in men favored by the state whose religious opinions could be enforced through threatenings, punishment, and imprisonment. No, these men stood on the Bible as their authority and were filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, when the council attempted to exercise their state-supported authority a second time (as recorded in Acts 5) by imprisoning them again for preaching in the name of Jesus, these men uttered the famous cry: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29 NKJV). My brothers and sisters, this has been the battle cry for Christians at all times and will continue to be so until Jesus returns. Those who recognize the authority of Christ will be put to the test by men and the wisdom of men who desire to control the conscience. There is no doubt the papacy has furnished us ample evidence of this type of coercion throughout history and it is our job to point it out. But friends... as we sit here today with Bible in hand, can we honestly say we "obey God rather than men"? When it comes to

worship? When it comes to raising our children, preaching the gospel, and educating the next generation? Do we recognize God as an authority over men? I want you to meditate on these questions. Because I think a usurper has come in who has steadily undermined the authority of God and put the authority of man in its place. Believe it or not our liberty of conscience is gravely threatened by it... And it has everything to do with which **authority** we put our trust in.... but I don't want to get ahead of myself. Before going further, let us pray for wisdom as we search the scriptures.....

Religious liberty is intrinsic to historic Protestantism and genuine Christianity. It is a theme embedded deeply in Scripture. We are in a power struggle between good and evil, between Christ and Satan, between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world... kingdoms which are under the prince and power of the air (cf Ephesians 2:2; 6:12). We have been warned by the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:8 (NKJV): “**Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.**” We are in war... and one of the weapons used by Satan against God's church is “**philosophy and empty deceit**” or “**the basic principles of the world.**” Satan uses these things to undermine the authority of God in the church because he knows how easily we're led astray by human opinion, especially when it comes with wealth, education, power, and influence. Satan knows that when the church is galvanized by the **authority** of God that it comes with a power that all the armies of Satan cannot overthrow. Therefore, let us unpack this war to better understand this issue of **authority** and its relevance to religious liberty.

In Revelation 12 we read about a war in heaven between Michael and Satan. We learn this war was brought down to this earth. Perhaps someone here today does not know it but Michael the archangel is Jesus Christ. The name Michael means “who is like God” and archangel simply means “highest or greatest messenger.” This can be translated as “the highest messenger who is like God.” While the word angel in Scripture generally refers to the angels themselves, it is also used to refer to men (e.g. 1 Sam. 29:9; Gal. 4:14; Gen. 32:24). We even find an “**angel**” being referred to as God. For example, a mysterious being identified as the “**angel of the LORD**” appeared to Manoah's wife, the mother of Samson. After this angel of Jehovah ascended into the flame on the altar, Manoah said to his wife: “**We shall surely die, because we have seen God**” (Judges 13:22). Even early Protestants, such as renowned Bible Commentator Matthew Henry, recognized this “**angel of the LORD**” as Michael, the very one identified in Daniel 12 as the “**the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people.**” This “standing” means to intercede or defend. Is this not what the messiah came to do? Indeed it is. This is the very one who is called “**Messiah the Prince**” in Daniel 9:25 and as such He can be none other than Jesus Christ.

Jesus... the mighty champion of our salvation, defeated Satan in heaven (casting him out) and then came down to this earth as the “**Son of Man**” and defeated Satan again. Remember, since Adam's fall Satan claimed authority over this world and therefore authority over humanity. In Luke 4: 5-6 (NKJV) we read: “**Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.'**” And so we see the Son of the Most High God, the great prince Michael, the captain of

heaven's armies, came down to this earth as Emmanuel, that is Jesus, to cast out Satan again. Not only did this validate Christ's authority as rightful Prince of heaven and earth but it made a way for us to be justly delivered from the "authority of darkness" that Satan wields in this world (Col. 1:13 *The Interlinear Greek-English NT*). This is why Jesus declared in John 12:31 (KJV): "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out." Jesus' life, death, and resurrection not only redeemed humanity from the curse of the law but it forever falsified Satan's accusation against God's law. So what does this mean? For one thing, it means as a defeated foe Satan is channeling his remaining power and hatred on the destruction God's church. In Revelation 12:10-12 (KJV) we read:

10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power [ἐξουσία, authority] of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. 12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitors of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

It is true that Satan is the chief agent attacking the church but we also see another agency—the state! In attempting to kill Christ at his birth, Satan used the government of Rome. As you all know, the religious leaders among the Jews conspired against Christ, having him crucified through the power of Rome. Of course, the influence of the Jews and the authority of Rome went no further than the grave. But... there is also another authority... one stronger than the grave and underlying the resurrection. **It is this authority** that is at the root of *the religious liberty* we as Christians are to stand upon in doctrine and in matters of the soul. The foundation of this liberty is connected to the exalted position of Jesus Christ. If you will, please turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 61 and notice what the prophet said. Again, Isaiah 61:1-2 (KJV) we read:

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD [i.e. Jehovah] is upon me; because the LORD [i.e. Jehovah] hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;  
2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD [i.e. Jehovah], and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

This is the passage Jesus read on the Sabbath day at the synagogue in Nazareth. The incident can be found in Luke 4:16-21 but for the sake of time let us consider what happened after the Lord read this passage in Isaiah. In Luke 4:20-21 (ASV) we read: "And he [Jesus] closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down: and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, **To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.**"

There you have it... Jesus declared himself to be the fulfillment of Isaiah 61. And indeed, this is what we find in Holy Scripture with the Son of God preaching the gospel to the poor, healing the brokenhearted, preaching deliverance to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and

setting at liberty those that are oppressed. We also see that when Jesus did THESE VERY THINGS He was questioned by the religious leaders regarding the basis of His authority. For example, after cleansing the temple we read in Matthew 21:23-27 (NKJV):

23 Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what **authority** are You doing these things? And who gave You this **authority**?”  
24 But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what **authority** I do these things: 25 The baptism of John —where was it from? From heaven or from men?”  
And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ 26 But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.” 27 So they answered Jesus and said, “We do not know.” And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what **authority** I do these things.”

We need to ask ourselves: Why did Jesus direct their minds to the baptism of John? Again they asked: “By what **authority** are You doing these things? And who gave You this **authority**?”

First of all, we should recognize that John baptized those who felt themselves sinners in need of repentance. He called all to repentance and gave a message of straight testimony. There is no doubt those whom he baptized included murderers, thieves, liars, extortioners, the sexual immoral, and all sorts of sinners. Did John the Baptist need a team of social workers, counselors, and therapists? Did he need to hand out questionnaires to profile their personality type and manufacture victims in need of special insight from alleged mental health experts? Do you think the people John preached to did not know what a hard life was? Do you think they didn't know about oppression? or depression? Of course they did! And they didn't need psychotherapy or psych-drugs. No, they needed repentance and the spirit of God. This is the authority that John stood upon when he preached. **What authority are we standing on today?** But I'm getting ahead of myself.

We know the religious leaders rejected the baptism of John and felt themselves secure in their Judaism, believing themselves to have a righteous standing before Jehovah. In stark contrast, the meek and humble Jesus responded to John's baptism of repentance. And unlike the religious leaders, Jesus actually was righteous in His standing before Jehovah! Understandably, this took John by surprise. So much so that according to Scripture, John “**tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”**” (Matthew 3:14 NKJV). Even though Jesus had NEVER sinned He still fully identified with sinful humanity, even assuming fallen human nature, being born of a woman and born under the law that God through Christ might reconcile the world to Himself. The mystery of godliness is linked to this truth **but our question right now is about authority...** Well... since Jesus directed the attention of the religious leaders to the baptism of John we too should direct our attention to it. Let us read Matthew 3:16-17 (KJV):

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

We really are a credulous society and we really like to be highly esteemed. Not surprisingly, this was also a problem in the time of Christ. Speaking of the religious leaders, Jesus said they loved “the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi” (Matt. 23:6-7 KJV). Today we like to be called: “doctor, doctor.” Well, true to form, those in the Sanhedrin were interested in Jesus’ credentials. They knew something was unique and different about Him but they refused to believe Jesus was the “only begotten Son of God.” How could He be when He associated with common people and didn’t go to their schools? In spite of their pride, Jesus turned their attention to the baptism of John because it is there that His credentials as the anointed one, the messiah, the Christ, yes, even the Son of God are fully answered by the Lord God Almighty Himself. Jehovah opened up the heavens and sent His Holy Spirit in radiating light to anoint His only begotten Son. Let us pause for a moment... God spoke audibly from heaven declaring: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (KJV). Remember, the chief priests and elders asked Jesus: “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?” To which Jesus responded: “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”

Jesus’ question not only contained the answer but also served as a mirror, showing their stubborn rejection of Him as the Son of God in the highest sense. You see, John had already borne witness that the baptism of Jesus was recognized by heaven. It is written in John 1:32, 34 (KJV):

32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him...

34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

Let us think about this for just a moment longer. Unlike the other gospels, Luke mentions that Jesus prayed at His baptism when the heavens were opened. In Luke 3:21 (KJV) we read: “Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened.”

I point this out to share an insightful statement from Ellen White about this incident. It can be found in the devotional entitled *Lift Him Up* on page 78. Notice the beauty and unsurpassed testimony accompanying the baptism of Jesus. I think many of us miss its significance, which is why I’ve emphasized it up to this point. Again on page 78 of the devotional *Lift Him Up* we read:

Upon coming up out of the water, Jesus bowed in prayer on the river bank. A new and important era was opening before Him (The Desire of Ages, 110, 111). {LHU 78.4} Never had angels listened to such a prayer. They were solicitous to bear to the praying Redeemer messages of assurance and love. But no; the Father Himself will minister to His Son. **Direct from the throne proceeded the light of the glory of God. The heavens were opened, and beams of light and glory proceeded therefrom and**



**assumed the form of a dove, in appearance like burnished gold. The dovelike form was emblematical of the meekness and gentleness of Christ.** {LHU 78.5}

The people stood spellbound with fear and amazement. Their eyes were fastened upon Christ, whose bowed form was bathed in the beautiful light and glory that ever surround the throne of God. His upturned face was glorified as they had never before seen the face of man. **The thunders rolled and the lightnings flashed from the opening heavens, and a voice came therefrom in terrible majesty, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”.... Jehovah’s voice assured Christ of His Sonship with the Eternal** (Youth’s Instructor, March 1, 1874). {LHU 78.6}

Is there a testimony greater than that of Jehovah? Absolutely not! While the testimony of John is certainly credible the validity of the Sonship or **authority** of Jesus did not depend on “**testimony from man**” (John 5:34) or even upon Jesus’ own witness about himself. That’s correct, Jesus himself declared in John 5:31 (KJV): “**If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.**” Now, stay with me church... it is written in John 5:36-40 (KJV):

36 But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.

37 And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. 38 And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. 39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. 40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

The validity of Jesus’ Sonship is integral to His **authority**. This fact is testified to according to our passage by 1.) the works He did, 2.) the witness of His Father, and 3.) the testimony of Holy Scripture concerning Him.

Considering all this... let us ask ourselves: what does this **authority** mean to you, to me, to all of us as believers, especially in the context of religious liberty? The word translated as “**authority**” comes from the Greek word **ἐξουσία**, which in the KJV is translated in various ways, such as jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, and strength. For example, in Matthew 9:1-8 we see where Jesus heals the man with palsy. And because He forgives the man of his sins the scribes reason among themselves that Jesus is blasphemous. This again reflects their refusal to recognize His **authority** as “**Messiah the Prince.**” Let us read Matthew 9:6-8 (KJV), where Jesus knowing their thoughts said:

6 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath **power** [i.e. ἐξουσίαν, authority] on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) **Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.** 7 And he arose, and departed to his house. 8 But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such **power** [i.e. ἐξουσίαν, authority] unto men.

Notice in verse 8 that because of the healing of the man’s palsy “**the multitudes saw it... and glorified God, which had given such power** [i.e. ἐξουσίαν, authority] unto men.” While Jesus

exercised such “power” or “authority” he also gave this “power” or “authority” to his disciples. It is written in Matthew 10:1 (NKJV):

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them **power** [i.e. ἐξουσίαν, i.e. authority] over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.

This truth about **authority** should not be missed because it is relevant to our understanding of religious liberty. Who has the authority to govern our conscience? Or to determine whether we are fit for the ministry of the church? According to Scripture the disciples were given **authority** over unclean spirits, sickness, and all kinds of disease inasmuch as it furthered the gospel of the kingdom of God. And it is by the **authority** given to Jesus from the Father that we are commanded to take His gospel to all the nations. The famous commission of Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJV) emphasizes this authority when it declares:

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All **authority** [i.e. ἐξουσία] has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the **name** of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

With the highest **authority** we have been given a mission to go into all nations and make disciples. At the same time, it is also true that God commanded us “to be subject unto the higher powers” (Romans 13:1 KJV). In other words, God has given the governing authorities of the world power to rule in civil affairs. So how do we reconcile these two authorities? If you will, please turn in your Bibles to Romans 13:1-7 (NKJV), which reads:

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing **authorities** [i.e. ἐξουσία]. For there is no **authority** [i.e. ἐξουσία] except from God, and the **authorities** [i.e. ἐξουσία] that exist are appointed by God.  
2 Therefore whoever resists the **authority** [i.e. ἐξουσία] resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the **authority** [i.e. ἐξουσία]? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. 5 **Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.**  
6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

The apostle Paul is upholding the teachings of Christ in this passage. Remember when the Pharisees and the Herodians tried to catch Jesus in His words, where they asked if it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not? Knowing their hypocrisy, Jesus asked them to bring Him a penny and then asked whose image and superscription was on it. After they acknowledged it had Caesar’s image and inscription, Jesus uttered those famous words found in Mark 12:17

(KJV): "...Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's..."

This truth was a beacon for the early church and the Protestant Reformation. There is a difference between God and Caesar. There is a difference between the King of kings and a simple king. It is true... as Christians we are to be subject to both God and governing **authorities**. However, when a prince, lord, magistrate, governor, or any representative of the state is not content with temporal jurisdiction in civil matters, thinking to climb up to heaven and sit on the throne of God in the sanctuary of the soul... it is then that Christians answer as "Peter and the other apostles" did when they declared in Acts 5:29 (KJV): "We ought to obey God rather than men." This is precisely what the antichrist power of Scripture attempts to do—exercise **authority** that belongs to God as the apostle Paul shows in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4.

You see, when talking about religious liberty we are NOT talking about legislating morality. We are talking about the freedom to worship God and raise our children according to conscience, without the molestation of the state in matters of the soul. We are talking about the **authority** of God's church to go into all the world and preach the gospel regardless of consequences. This is precisely what the apostolic church did, even suffering martyrdom. Tradition about how they were killed is told by 4th century Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History* and also reiterated in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* published in the 16th century. An exposition on the book of Revelation entitled *An Enduring Vision: Revelation Revealed*, by the late Austin Cooke, succinctly highlights some of the exploits of the early church on pages 44-45. In obedient submission to the **authority** of Christ we learn that:

- James the son of Zebedee was executed by Herod Agrippa in AD 44
- Philip was scourged and imprisoned for preaching the gospel in upper Asia and crucified in AD 54
- Matthew labored in Parthia and Ethiopia and was killed in AD 60 by a halberd which is a spear-like battle axe.
- James the less, a brother of Jesus was stoned by fellow Jews at the age of 94; it is said his brains were dashed out by the fuller's club.
- Matthias (who replaced Judas Iscariot the traitor) was stoned at Jerusalem and beheaded.
- Andrew, Peter's brother, labored in several countries and was crucified in Syria.
- Mark, while laboring in the famous city of Alexandria located in Egypt, was pulled to pieces by an angry mob of idolaters.
- Both Peter and Paul were killed under the emperor Nero in Rome with tradition saying Peter was crucified upside down with Paul being beheaded in AD 68.
- Jude (aka, Thaddeus) is said to have been crucified at Edessa in AD 72.
- Bartholomew while laboring in India was beaten and crucified by a mob of idolaters.
- Thomas labored in Parthia and India and was killed by a Hindu Priest, being thrust through with a spear....

And the list can go on..... The point is these men were not out of harmony with Romans 13 as it pertains to being subject to "higher powers." They were indeed subject to "governing authorities" in civil matters but not in religious matters. Religious liberty means we cannot be bound by state sanctioned policies that compete with the **authority** of Jesus Christ. It is by this



**authority** that the disciples of Christ went into all world preaching the gospel of the kingdom, exalting Jesus as Lord and savior of the world, teaching the resurrection of the dead, and warning of the judgment to come!

At this point, we need to pause and ask ourselves: does the **authority** of Jesus Christ still stand in heaven and on earth? Does it stand in how you educate your children? Does it stand in your marriage? Does it stand in regard to what you put into your body? Does the state have the right to force psychiatric drugs into your child? Or mandate that a parent take their child to a psychiatrist? or to force the parent to submit to the policies of a board of education governed by the sciences of the mind? Yes church, all these things matter when we discuss religious liberty. When men and women or various institutions attempt to compel the conscience or govern in matters of the soul, then by the **authority** of heaven we should obey God rather than men. This is what we learn in Scripture. We see this principle adhered to by the Christians who suffered persecution under pagan Rome. We also see this with the Christians who suffered persecution under papal Rome with its butchering, burning, and torturing of approximately 50 to 150 million people. Among these include the Waldenses, Albigenses, and the French Huguenot Protestants. This includes the papal crusades and inquisitorial tribunals, where they tried to peer into the souls of men and women in violation of conscience to kill suspected heretics.

Think about the Thirty Years' War involving the major powers in Europe, especially Germany. The Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II of Bohemia attacked the right of Protestants to worship God according to their conscience. The church of Rome was not happy that Lutheran princes were able to secure religious liberty at the treaty of Augsburg on September 25, 1555 and so the papists fomented what we now call the Thirty Years' War. In *History of the Church of God* (published in 1886) Cushing B. Hassell says this jesuit-instigated war reduced "the people to cannibalism, and the population of Bohemia from 4,000,000 to 780,000, and of Germany from 20,000,000 to 7,000,000... making Southern Germany almost a desert..." ~ Chapter XVII p. 507

It has been essentially 500 years since Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg against the corruptions of Roman Catholicism. Luther dared to oppose the ordinances of popes, bishops, church councils, and therefore the government itself. The emperor Charles V along with bishops and cardinals wanted to silence Luther as the church had done to Huss and Jerome a century earlier, where it burned them at the stake. Can you imagine going into hiding because powerful men and government leaders want you dead and have the power torture and kill you? How important is freedom of conscience to you? Do you recognize the authority of Christ even when a temporal authority has jurisdiction to kill you? You see, **religious liberty is a question of authority** and it's a question that sometimes comes with grave consequences. Remember what Revelation 12:11 (KJV) said of those who overcome Satan: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."

We Adventists usually focus our attention on Sabbath-work issues or the concerted efforts of evangelicals for the passage of Sunday laws, which infringe on religious liberty. **As important as this is, I would like to direct your attention to a usurper. A system of philosophy**

**which undermines the authority of God and unites with the state against the conscience of faithful believers. This philosophy and so-called science is teaching us things that are directly contrary to the word of God.**

Many of us get upset about homosexuality and marriage, but who taught society that Homosexuality is not a sin? NOT THE BIBLE! Who teaches us that a person who spends between 4 to 12 years of school studying the theories of philosophy written by atheists, philanderers, drug-users, homosexuals, and haters of God enables such a one to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart, to bind up the broken hearted, and give peace to the poor? NOT THE BIBLE! Who teaches us that children cannot exercise self-control and like dumb animals they have to be given toxic drugs which have been shown to retard normal brain development just to sit in class? NOT THE BIBLE! Who instructs teachers not to tell students they are wrong to protect their self-esteem, when they answer  $2 + 2 = 5$ ? NOT THE BIBLE! Who teaches children to esteem themselves greater than their peers? NOT THE BIBLE! Who teaches married couples that adultery, pornography, self-abuse, and all forms of vile wickedness is not sin? NOT THE BIBLE! Who teaches families that the father is not the head of the home and that children don't have to obey their parents? NOT THE BIBLE! Who tells parents that they cannot spank their children and that children belong to the state? NOT THE BIBLE! Who teaches families that man and not God is the author of a peaceful home? NOT THE BIBLE! Who teaches ministers that they need to be psychologically evaluated... that the Bible is not not enough to reach unbelievers? Who teaches that the Bible alone is not sufficient for meeting our deepest needs and that we need psychology? NOT THE BIBLE! What excuses sin and accountability in men and women when they should be purifying themselves in hope (1 John 3:3) and preparing to meet the Lord in the clouds? NOT THE BIBLE!

It is not the Bible that is teaching us to deny the name of Jesus and look to **another authority**. No, the great usurper of authority is the sciences of the mind with psychology & psychiatry. Yes, this sounds strange to most of us because we do not realize how much the sciences of the mind have impacted society, including the church. We do not discern its influences upon government, law, education, religion, the ministry, the family with marriage, divorce, and parenting. Thousands of examples can be given and many books have been written, but I will only give a few examples for the sake of time.

Did you know a British news outlet called *The Telegraph* published an article on July 2, 2015 stating that the "Children and Young People Act" in Scotland will come into effect this year mandating a state visitor to come into the home of every child born to make sure the child is being raised according to government standards, that is psychological standards? This is utterly sickening! It is tyranny! In the past when the Papacy through the power of the state appointed "special" monitors to see that Protestant Children were raised according to its dictates, Protestants rose up with sword in hand to resist or flee to the mountains. Yet, under the guise of "science" (i.e. philosophy and vain deceit) the once Protestant nation of Scotland is willing to offer its children to the altar of psychology. God have mercy! But things aren't better here in the states either. This is a nation that once taught its children the Protestant principle espoused by Thomas Jefferson when he said: "**I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man**" (Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, September 23, 1800). But not anymore... no, under the name of "science" and social progress

and psychology we are surrendering our morals, our parenting, and our minds to **another authority**, which is not of God.

For example in 2011 the California Governor signed a bill requiring “public schools in the state to teach students about the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans” (See CNN July 15, 2011 “California governor signs bill requiring schools to teach gay history”). The American Psychological Association has no problem with this either. Fred Kaeser a doctor of education opined in an article published December 14, 2011 in *Psychology Today* that he— NOT The BIBLE— “advise[s] parents that the age of 5 is a wonderful time to lay a foundation...” for what the Bible calls “unnatural desires” and “strange flesh” in order “to instill in your young child a sense of tolerance and acceptance for being lesbian or gay.” The September 2015 edition of the magazine *Parents* has an article entitled “Transparenthood: What it’s really like to raise a transgender child.” This article has the support of the American Psychological Association in helping parents identify whether their child is really transgender, even by the age of three!!! The article directs parents to a licensed “gender therapists” who can help a confused parent and child to recognize if the boy in question is really a girl or if the girl is really a boy—you know, on the inside. That’s right, these “gender therapists” are there to help identify a so-called “transgender child” and even help with the transition process! They are telling us what is normal and what isn’t sin. Again, the Bible isn’t telling us any of these things. But there is more... we even find The American Psychological Association condemning spanking (see B. L. Smith. *The Case Against Spanking*. April 2012; vol. 43(issue 4): p. 60). Again, the Word of God is not in harmony with the American Psychological Association in this matter. Yet this does not matter because we even find the actual denigration of the Bible itself (see J. E. Robinson, *Psychology Today*, “Is the Bible obsolete?” September 27, 2009). I know this is a lot to think about, but among these mental health experts we also find the legitimization of adultery (see M. D. White, *Psychology Today* “Is Adultery ever justified?” July 3, 2012).

Church family.... we are not talking about a few rebels in a profession. No, we are talking about the profession itself. Yes, the people who write the textbooks and oversee the licensing process. They are essentially telling us what the Bible calls evil is really a form of psychological distress instead of sin.

Through a union of psychology and the state both our children’s minds and our own minds are under attack. We are being told to call evil good and good evil... all in the name of “science” and progress. Worst of all, in this nation when a mother of an autistic child attempts to stop her daughter from taking a psychiatric drug (which is actually making her child sick) the Mother is met with a SWAT team with loaded weapons pointed at her. Yes, Detroit mother Maryanne Godboldo refused the authority of Child Protective Service (CPS)—that is refused to put her child on psychiatric drugs. And in response the state officials were sent to her house to take custody of her daughter. Yes Church family, we are talking about a mother who was trying to protect her daughter from being forcibly drugged—with a drug which doctors even testified that her daughter did not need, even admitting it was indeed toxic. In the “land of the free” Maryanne barricaded herself in her home with a firearm to protect her daughter from psychiatric molestation. They came with a SWAT team, a tank, and eventually after 10 hours they were able to break into her home and take her daughter.—ALL BECAUSE A MOTHER

SOUGHT TO EXERCISE HER RIGHT AS A PARENT CONTRARY TO WILL OF THE PSYCHIATRIC STATE! For this sin, Maryanne Godboldo was placed in prison for 5 days and her daughter was placed in a pediatric psychiatric facility. Fortunately, a bold Detroit Attorney, Allison Folmar, defended Godboldo in 15 court appearances and fought for her daughter. Thankfully, the judge ruled the seizure of Maryanne's daughter was not only illegal, but unconstitutional and her daughter was ordered to be released from the psychiatric hospital. Unfortunately, this is not how most cases usually end. Usually the state wins and the child continues to be forcibly medicated and the only option for the parent is to either submit to the psych-doc or lose custody of their child. Is this not tyranny? Is this not a violation of conscience before God? We talk a lot about religious liberty.... but I cannot believe we are not talking about this!!!

I wish I had more time to discuss historically how children once were able to listen to 3 hour sermons, how at the age of three they were working on the farm with their parents, how Waldense children before the age of 10 memorized entire books of the Bible... BUT NOT TODAY.... with all of our "progress" children can't listen to a sermon longer than 20 minutes without being entertained. Too often today parenting is replaced with toxic drug-taking and any attempt to say a child doesn't need these toxic drugs is met with seething anger and resistance. Can't you see, what we have today is NOT what Christ intended for His Church? Why would we ever look to this wicked generation for answers about parenting or education? Especially after everything we have been taught as a church? We come here to worship... we sing praises to God's holy name! ...And we say He is powerful and mighty! And then we look to this wicked generation with their so-called sciences of the mind for answers!

The greatest power in the world to restore and renew the mind is conversion and the indwelling Spirit of Christ... **not drugs** and **not psychology** or endless hours of talking about oneself. What you must understand is that this so-called "science" is really a competing **authority** with the Bible and as a society and a church we have accepted this usurper without any critical thought.

The powers of psychiatry and the therapeutic state are exercised in the name of science. This is illustrated by its ability to label a behavior as mental illness. Today if a 6 year old talks out of turn in class, gets up out of his seat more than 3 times, day dreams, doesn't want to do his assignment, then the child is labeled as "ADD" or "ADHD." There is no drawing of blood to detect the alleged chemical imbalance, there is no x-ray, MRI, CT scan... just a label which often comes from some one who has never taken a single course in anatomy or physiology and doesn't know anything about biochemistry. Yet most accept these cheap labels like "ADD" without a second thought.... **I have big news**: the chemical imbalance theory of the brain and these psychological labels are total fraud and are not supported by a shred of any legitimate science. The truth is that psychology and psychiatry are filled to the brim with speculation. They are essentially attempting to take fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil while delving into matters they know nothing about. In reality psychology is really a pseudoscience. As a matter of fact, some psychologist and psychiatrists view themselves not as operators of science but more like priests and spiritual gurus of a new age. Even psychologists and University professor Paul C. Vitz views his field as a religion with its own messiahs and disciples. We are NOT dealing with science like physics or chemistry. We are

not dealing with **verifiable pathology** as we do in medicine with diabetes and cancer. No, with psychology we are dealing with the mind or soul which is metaphysical. You cannot dissect an emotion the way a cadaver is dissected in gross anatomy. We cannot draw blood to discover someones feelings. Looking at an MRI or PET scan and viewing blood in the lobes of the brain to discuss personality or behavior is no different than 19th century phrenologists feeling the bumps on your head to locate character traits in accordance with the contours of your skull.

The word “psychology” is derived from the Greek words ψυχη (i.e. soul) and λογος (i.e. doctrine)—meaning the study of the soul. Isn't this what the ministry is about? Yes it most certainly is! This is why Ellen White said in volume 1 of *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 10: "The true principles of psychology are found in the Holy Scriptures." This is why the Puritans called the ministry “soul-work.” Christians have no need of psychology because wherever it is true it agrees with Scripture and is therefore unnecessary because we have Scripture. Today this soul-work has been largely given over to psychology and its various branches. Listen, don't misunderstand me. I'm more than happy to discuss science, medicine, physiology, biochemistry and more as it pertains to this topic. For the record, I regularly study and appreciate real science. However, it is the word of God that stands as the final authority. And as far as the soul or mind are concerned, please notice what is written in Hebrews 4:12-13 (NKJV):

12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

The wisdom of man cannot uncover the depths of the soul. However, the Word of God has this power and this is why the Bible and not psychology is the true source of **authority** in matters of the soul. The Bible was the man of counsel in the early church. It was the strength and wisdom of the SDA pioneers. It is the word of God that has the power to sustain and change us. It is written in Psalm 19:7 (KJV): “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.” Do you believe this? Can the word of God turn the most troubled and crooked soul from a life of sin to a life of righteousness? Do you believe this? As believers we ought to cease from trusting in the opinions of men and instead turn to the “testimony of the LORD.”

What does the word of God teach us about the mind or heart? Well, it is God who said in Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV): “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” Do you believe this? Or are we like the wicked Jews of old who rejected the testimony of Jehovah's audible voice? Shall we ignore the word of God and be credulous too, esteeming our titles and learning higher than the word of God? “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” The answer is not you or I. It is certainly not the psychologist or psychiatrist that know the heart. Who is it that knows the heart? What does the Bible say? In the very next verse God says: “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:10 NKJV). Therefore when these so-called mental health experts come



armed with statistics and their pseudoscience, pretending to know the heart or mind then you have a decision to make and it may come with consequences because these so-called experts (like the priests and popes of old) have the backing of the state. Keep in mind, I do not care if a person wants to go see a psychologist or psychiatrist. That is a person's choice. My concern is when these so-called experts are given authority over the church, the family, the school system, the courts, and then given the ability to force their philosophy and drugs upon people. This is akin to rape.

The so called "mental health" profession is in nearly every facet of society telling us how to raise our children, how to educate them, and even taking them away by force the same way the Church of Rome took Protestant Huguenot children away from their parents and stuck them in Catholic schools for indoctrination.

I'm sorry church... I don't enjoy telling you this... I'm not happy to offend anyone but the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist church is filled with pastors and church leaders who turn from the Scriptures to psychology or attempt to intermingle the two. Yet it is written in 1 Corinthians 10:21 (NKJV): "[You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.](#)" Many pastors actually leave seminary to get a degree in psychology because they feel inept in the pulpit without it. Now why would they believe such a thing!?! Because the "[basic principles of the world](#)" (Col. 2:8) have been adopted by the church, by our universities, and are a natural by-product of worldly policy within our institutions. Ministers are trained to know when to "defer and refer" to a so-called mental health expert. The sciences of the mind with their self-theories and unbiblical views regarding human nature are far reaching. For example, psychiatrists are drugging the military to death. They are drugging children to death. For crying out loud, they are even labeling pets as depressed and drugging them too! The insights of psychology fill television shows, movies, talk shows, radio shows, nearly everywhere its ubiquitous philosophy can be seen slithering around.

Perhaps some of you don't know that Sister White warned that near the close of probation the efforts of Satan would be characterized by the sciences of the mind. That's right, it's mentioned in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 290 but I'm going to quote from its original source, *The Signs of the Times*, published Nov. 6, 1884, where Sister White wrote:

Serpent-like, he [Satan] imperceptibly creeps in to corrupt the work of God. This entering in of Satan through the sciences is well devised. Through the channel of phrenology, psychology, and mesmerism, he comes more directly to the people of this generation, and **works with that power which is to characterize his efforts near the close of probation.** . . . And while those who are devoted to these sciences, laud them to the heavens because of the great and good work which they affirm are wrought by them, they little know what a power for evil they are cherishing. . . . Mark the influence of these sciences, dear reader; for the conflict between Christ and Satan is not yet ended.

Let me ask a question: are we living near the close of probation? If so, shouldn't we as Adventists be concerned about the sciences of the mind and the influence of psychology in the

church? Ironically we are not. We have swallowed it whole. We love it, we embrace it, we study it, we are employed in it, we parrot out its philosophy as gospel truth, and we encourage our members not only to embrace it but to not question it.

When I got my degree in theology we were taught that the problems of lust and adultery (things thoroughly addressed in the Bible) were too big for us and we needed to send church members with these problems to a therapist. In other words, we are being taught the Bible is not enough to help someone dealing with lust (manifested through the internet) or to help someone practicing an open marriage. In other words... it wasn't a conversion problem but rather a psychological problem. There you have it church... with one broad stroke the 2,000 year old history of Christianity which transformed lives and converted men from the grossest forms of immorality to a noble life is swept away. In this day and age we are told to depend on someone who studied the philosophical opinions of men for 4 to 6 years? Instead of the Bible we are taught to integrate Maslow's eastern philosophy of the Hierarchy of Human Needs in the pastoral ministry. And all this is done without a fight... all in the name of progress and science!

I opposed this infiltration of psychology in the church then and I still oppose it today. I have worked in a behavior modification program and in the field as a social worker with therapists, psychologists, and CPS. While doing these things I began to realize that trusting in them is like leaning on the broken reed of Egypt. They are just men and women; they don't have any better understanding of the mind than an auto mechanic or a janitor (as far as training is concerned). The only difference is they have the backing of the state and a psychological society ready to accept their doctrines without question. Psychology has essentially become the religion of the secular state.

While Mrs. White's words were written over a 130 years ago and prove to be undeniably prophetic. Astoundingly, even some Sunday Christians who know nothing about her warnings and could care less about her counsel, such as the famous Baptist pastor John MacArthur, wrote:

The church is thereby ingesting heavy doses of dogma from psychology, adopting secular wisdom, and attempting to sanctify it by calling it Christian. Evangelicalism's most fundamental values are thus being redefined. 'Mental and emotional health' is the new buzzword. It is not a biblical concept, though many seem to equate it with spiritual wholeness. Sin is called sickness, so people think it requires therapy, not repentance. Habitual sin is called addictive or compulsive behavior, and many surmise its solution is medical care rather than moral correction.

Human therapies are embraced most eagerly by the spiritually weak—those who are shallow or ignorant of biblical truth and who are unwilling to accept the path of suffering that leads to spiritual maturity and deeper communion with God. The unfortunate effect is that these people remain immature, held back by a self-imposed dependence on some pseudo-Christian method or psycho-quackery that actually stifles real growth.

The more secular psychology influences the Church, the further people move from a biblical perspective on problems and solutions. One-on-one therapists are replacing the Bible, God's chief means of sanctifying grace. ~ (John F. MacArthur, Jr.

and Wayne A. Mack, *Introduction to Biblical Counseling: A Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling* (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 1994), 17).

My brothers and sisters, ask yourself: is it not noteworthy that a Baptist minister and theologian such as John MacArthur sounds more like an Adventist pioneer (in this matter) than modern SDAs who drink down the wine of psychology? We have been robbed of the confidence we should have in the Word of God. Most equate spiritualism simply with the doctrine of immortality of the soul. Yet SDA pioneers knew better. They knew spiritualism included doctrines of demons that work to deceive and to prepare us for the final deception of these last days as written in 1 Timothy 4:1 (NKJV) which declares: “[Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.](#)” While the doctrine of the immortal soul allows a baptist like MacArthur to be deceived by fallen angels, the doctrines of psychology have allowed Satan to slither his way into the Adventist church and undermine the authority of the Word of God in matters of the soul. It has medicalized behavior and redefined sin as a disease. Instead of repentance and self-denial the answer is therapy and medication. The cry goes out: “You don’t understand, I have ODD and forgot to take my medication!” I can’t even begin to tell you how deluded this thinking is, not only in the light of Scripture but even in the scope of medical science. The false doctrines of psychology and psychiatry have aided in excusing sin and removing accountability, because hey!.... it’s nobodies fault. It’s a “disorder” or a “disease.” Right? Wrong! This is a most subtle attack on the law of God because it undermines holiness in the name of science. I’m sorry church... but in the judgment nobody is going to be able to tell God: “It is not my fault, the psych-doc said I had ADHD and I forgot to take my medication to give me self-control.” While the doctrine of immortality of the soul CANNOT deceive Seventh-day Adventists, Satan has been succeeding through the sciences of the mind to keep us prisoners of philosophy and vain deceit. Satan uses whatever form of spiritualism he can to deceive.

As we conclude, I make this appeal to you in the context of religious liberty because the **authority** of heaven has been attacked and undermined in the most subtle way among God’s last day people. We need to see where we have erred and turn to the living God. We need to recognize the might and power of the Lord God Almighty and the authority He gave to His Son and thereby the church. It is written in 1 Corinthians 3:18-20 (NKJV):

[18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness”; 20 and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.](#)

The wisdom of this world is [foolishness](#) with God. The greek word for foolishness in this passage is [μωρία](#), which is where we get the word “moron.” In other words, human wisdom is moronic in the sight of God! While we lift it up to the heavens and get degrees in it and feel real smart... God is not impressed. Church family, the word of God is our weapon against darkness. The word of God is our source of hope in the face of despair. The word of God is our solid foundation in the midst of the sinking sands of human wisdom. When divine revelation is no longer forced to share the throne with human opinion or secular psychology then the church

will experience a revival of real godliness and the power of the Holy Spirit. The loud cry of Revelation 18 is not going to happen through psychologizing the church, or sending people to therapy, or drugging people over their feelings or behavior, or from taking personality tests to determine who is fit for the ministry. Is the gospel that weak? Did it really limp along for 2,000 years until the doctrines of psychology finally arrived to give the church its wisdom and show Christians how to truly help people with real problems? Just as God did not need popes and priests dictating anything to the church, neither does Jehovah need psychologists and psychiatrists overseeing the ministry or being granted authority in matters that He has never given them. It does not matter if the state grants them such authority anymore than it mattered that the papacy with its cardinals, bishops, priests, and popes held authority over the church through the power of the state. The authority of the church stands on prophets, apostles, and Jesus Christ himself!

While Satan certainly uses confrontation and the sword to destroy the church, his most successful means is not confrontation but infiltration with a serpent-like subtlety that corrupts the work of God through spurious doctrines and philosophies that supplant God's word in an attempt to sit on His throne and thus receive worship that is due only to God and His Son Jesus Christ. May God help us because we will have no excuse in the judgment if we neglect so great a salvation and trample upon His word, treating it common and believing the lie that it is insufficient for a life of godliness. A Word, that for standing upon, God-fearing men and women of old have been fed to lions, sawn in two, butchered, and thrown from mountain tops to a jagged and rocky grave. With so great a cloud of witness we will have no excuse for what we have done and are doing today.... May God help us.