

– THE NATURE OF AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE –

1. Introduction

Christ's statement 'All authority is given unto me' (Matt. 28:18) is the equivalent to saying, 'The Father has given all things into the hands of the Son (John 3:35, cf. Matt. 11:27, John 5:19–28).' This means that Jesus has authority in all heaven and earth. He is Lord of all. It means that such authority has been given to a man, that authority which alone is God's, the King of all the earth, and the Potentate of the Kingdom of heaven.

This fact is so significant, that we must come to understand the nature of authority, without which we cannot understand the nature of obedience, much less see its significance.

2. The Nature of Authority

The word *exousia* in the N.T. contains two thoughts (a) The right to control or have authority, and (b) The freedom to do all that is within this right, as also the power to effect the right. The actual power to effect is the *dunamis*, or *kratos*, or *ischus*, three words which can be translated roughly as power, might, and strength, in English. In practical fact one may have actual power to accomplish a thing without having the right (authority), whilst one may sometimes have authority, without having the means whereby to fulfil it. Only in the case of God do the two match wholly together.

In order to understand authority we must trace the structure (or, structures) of authority, as they are shown in the Scriptures. Modern man generally understands reason to be his authority. Generally speaking he seeks to use reason to establish the nature of things as they genuinely appear to be, and so to adduce principles by which he may operate. Rationalism is that system which claims that only that which is observable by the mind has any claim to authenticity, and it entirely discounts the emotions (romanticism) and the (so-called) supernatural. A reaction to rationalism is existentialism, which is not, as such, irrationalism, but lays emphasis upon the inwardness of man, rather than the merely observable phenomena of the universe. Other orders of authority are seen in the Church as having the commission and ability to teach and decide certain categories of truth and action, or in the Bible itself constituting such an order. Some see the Church as subject to the Scriptures or the Scriptures subject to the Church. Yet another approach is that the Holy Spirit, in this age, is the true authority to which both Church and Scriptures are subject.

We need to understand what is the constitutive authority (or, authorities) in the universe ? and we will seek what is revealed in the Scriptures. We need not think that what is revealed in the Scriptures will be abstract and unrelated to the universe as it is. Indeed we expect to see its teaching

make the universe as we have come to know it even more intelligible in the light of its revelation.

(i) The Supreme Authority – God

God is described as ‘a faithful Creator’ (I Peter 4:19). This means that He, by creation, has the right to control His universe, and that all He creates must correspond to His nature as Creator. He is described variously as ‘King of all the earth’, ‘Lord of heaven and earth’, ‘judge of all the earth’, and so on, and His works are said to praise Him, meaning that there is nothing in His universe which is not functional and purposeful. See I Tim. 6:15, Dan. 2:47, Gen. 18:25, Luke 10:21, Proverbs 16:4, Eccles. 3:11. His authority is then over all the creation. His will is total, and His purpose within the creation at once constitutes His right to effect it, as also to order all things to that end. See Ephesians 1:3–14, 3:7–11, Revelation 10:1–7, Acts 3:21.

Being ‘faithful Creator’ it means that His entire creation is wholly contingent upon Him, and therefore is wholly subject to him. That which is not subject to Him can only be called rebellious, and not consonant with its own authentic (created) being. This is only possible, (being rebellious) because God has given to His rational creatures the right to make their own choices, since they are reflecting His own power to choose according to His will .

Within the Godhead there are authorities. These are not easily distinguishable by us because we cannot understand the relationships of the Persons within this order. That God is love, and that the Father loves, the Son loves, and the Spirit loves, tells us practically that they are wholly One. Yet One Person is Father, in His eternal order as Father, being essentially Father. Another is Son, in His eternal order as such, as Son, and is so subject to the Father. The First operates as Father, and the Second as Son. The Third Person, the holy Spirit is eternally essentially Spirit, and is known as ‘the Spirit of the Father’, and the ‘Spirit of the Son’ (cf. Matt. 10:20, Gal.4:6) as often ‘The Spirit of the Lord’, ‘the Spirit of Jesus’, and so on, indicating that He relates to and serves both the Two Persons. This, of course, is our human (and thus, limited) language, describing a realm beyond our absolute comprehension. Yet we adduce that whereas God has authority over all things, there are orders of authority within the Godhead. Having said this we should be careful in our use of the word ‘subordination’, and even more careful as to what we understand by such a word. Love co-ordinates the authority and function within the Godhead.

(ii) Authorities within the Universe

The ‘faithful Creator’ may only be called that because His universe is true and rational. We mean it is wholly functional (cf. Gen. 1:31). Passages such as John 1:1–3, Col. 1:15–17, I Cor. 8:6, Hebrews 11:3, cf. 1:2–3, indicate that the created universe is a whole, and was made as a harmony. Whilst man lives in his ‘seen’ universe (visible mostly to him) he recognises that there is the unseen. The man of faith is not a rationalist, although his approach is not irrational. Hence he acknowledges the revelation that there is an unseen world – the heavens – and unseen beings – celestial creatures. Properly he should not see them as two worlds, but as all together, constituting the whole creation. He sees the seen and the unseen irrevocably linked together, constituting the one. Hence the orders of authority are not two separate orders for two separate worlds, one seen, one unseen.

(a) Celestial Authorities

Over all the creation is God as Father, as the Eternal Son, and as the Eternal Spirit. Under this Godhead are powers created by God celestial creatures given the names of 'living creatures' (Rev. 4:6), 'cherubim' (Gen.3:24 etc.), 'archangels' (I Thess. 4:16 cf. 'chief prince' Dan.10:13, Jude 9), 'angels', and 'throne', 'dominions', 'principalities', 'authorities' (Col. 1:16 etc.). It is clear from the Scriptures which relate to these powers – even the powers which rebelled – that they have been given authority within the universe, and this extends to the visible created sphere. Hence some angels are designated as related to the peoples of the earth such as we see in Daniel chs. 10 and 11. The rise and fall of nations (peoples) is connected with their operations. Jesus claims that such powers ascend and descend as they relate to Him as the Son of man (John 1:51, cf. Genesis 28:12).

Passages such as Revelation 12:1–9, Jude 6, II Peter 2:4, with Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, Luke 10:18 and Luke 4:5–6 make it clear that there was a rebellion amongst celestial creatures – against God – led by Satan, the devil, who was able to muster one third of the angelic powers to be with him in his rebellion. It is also clear that the authority given to these powers, was not, as such, withdrawn, although curbs were placed, and in the ultimate, judgement will come to these powers because of the misuse and abuse of their authority. It was given for a purpose, and must only be used for that end, which is a great principle of authority, anywhere.

(b) Terrestrial Authorities

The authorities that be are ordained of God – this is the principle stated in Romans 13:1ff. 'There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.' Paul further says, 'Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgement.' The same principle is in Titus 3:1 – 'Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient....' I Peter 2:13–14, 17 says 'Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors sent by him to punish those who do wrong, and to praise what is right Fear God. Honour the emperor.'

It has been shown that in the Book of the Acts the Christians never sought deliberately to rebel against the civil powers, nor to make insurrection. The book carefully shows that when trouble was stirred up, it was by the opponents of the Gospel. In every case the believers are vindicated.

The point of constituted authorities is that their authority comes from God, and is to be used for God's purposes. We will later see under the heading of law that the universal laws of the universe reflect the righteousness of God, and are in fact the true functional principles of His creation. Authorities are there to maintain the law and order of the universe. Hence God as God heads up both celestial and terrestrial authorities. He is 'King over all the earth', and 'by Him kings reign', and He is 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords.'

Divisions of terrestrial powers. The initial unit of man was the family. The book of Genesis is concerned with such and records the genealogies of families. With the growth of families came larger groupings, defined as nations, or peoples. The people of God and its orders of authority is a subject in itself, but the terrestrial powers known as kings or governors,

is also related to the system of elders which existed in the tribes. These generally had the function of having a pastoral oversight of the people, and the function of judging according to the laws of the people. Whilst they judged for the sake of justice, law-keeping bodies such as police were rarely if ever known. The people themselves carried out the execution of the judgement pronounced. Where there were armed forces they often acted as constabulary. However we ought not to read some of our present policing structures back into the early history of the Bible.

The family unit was indeed a powerful one. Without doubt the patriarchal head was acknowledged and obeyed, even though dead. Abraham stands at the head of his ever-increasing family, and Jews, Moslems and Christians think of him as their father. John 8:39–40 (cf. Gal. 3:7–9) shows that true members of the family act as did their father. Without doubt the father is to his family what God (the Father) is to His. Honouring of both parents is demanded within the family unit. Then, in the order of the family the first son has place of honour amongst his brothers and sisters, receiving more than others in the inheritance. In the family itself the younger serves the older.

In the orders of male and female, the husband is head of the wife, for according to I Cor. 11:3 ‘the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.’ Whilst man is not made for woman, but woman for man, yet in the Lord neither is independent of the other (v 11). However, in the order of Gen. 3:16 the husband shall rule over the wife. When marriage arrives the daughter is given by the father, primarily, and is seen to belong to him until he gives her to another man. She is under the tutelage of either the father or the husband. Once removed from the father she belongs to the husband. There is no suggestion that she is other than a full person, and belonging to her father or husband does not mean she is either a servant or an inferior person.

It may well be observed that anthropologically the above system does not obtain throughout the human race. Matriarchy is often the order within a family and tribe. Polyandry exists rather than polygyny, or polygamy rather than monogamy. In some systems there may not be an honouring of both parents, and so the structures of authority may be seen to vary.¹

(c) Authorities Within the People of God

The pattern we have seen above concerning kings, judges, rulers and elders, was the system within the people of God. Monogamy was the initial order for man, the wife being subject to her husband, the daughter belonging to her father until given to her husband.

Within the polity of Israel, which was a theocracy, the leader, judge or ruler was the representative of the Lord, the God of Israel. Passages such as Deut. 17:8–13, Proverbs 8:15–16, Daniel 2:21, 4:17, Deut. 19:17, God appoints all judges, and especially those amongst His people, so that they are to be obeyed. Judges and priests are the very mouthpiece of God, in their judgements. This is so because they judge by the law which has been given by God.

When it comes to the Church the order is very clear:– Christ is the head of the church, and all members are subject to him. They are also subject to one another (Cf. Ephes. 5:21), and the subjection works itself out in particular with the wife being subject to the husband, the children to the parents, slaves to their masters, and the masters to the Lord. Indeed all are in subjection to one another out of fear of the Lord. Then, within

¹ The explanation of this could be found in Romans 1:19f., i.e. when God was rejected so was His order for authority. Hence the variety of orders is explained by rebellion. For this reason we should look at the authority structures within the people of God.

the structure of the church there are gift ministries which have authority the apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor and teacher. It is clear from Acts 15:19–35 that the apostles and elders, together with the prophets have authority. This would be no less with pastor–teachers, and the latter seem to be those called elders in the pastoral epistles, as also in Acts 20. We gather that these are the ones who are overseers over the church (Acts 20:28). They are those mentioned in I Thess. 5:12, Hebrews 13:1 and 17 as also in I Tim. 3:2, II Tim. 2:2, 4:1–5, and Titus 1:9. Peter speaks of them in I Peter 5:1–4. Deacons, also, have authority, but mainly in the areas in which they minister to the poor and to the widows. Young folk are to be submitted to their elders (I Peter 5:5, cf. I Tim. 5:1), and young women are to learn from the older ones, as in Titus 2:3–5.

The Body of Christ, the Church, is truly the people of God when its members are submitted to the orders of authority within the church, within its constituent families, as also in the family of God. At the same time its members must be personally submitted to those civil powers under which each finds himself to be placed.

(d) Man and His Authority Within the Universe

Whilst this heading is strictly speaking a sub-heading of ‘(b)’ (above) i.e. under the heading of ‘Terrestrial powers’, yet man is given very special authority in the universe. He is said to be ‘a little less than God’, or ‘a little lower than the angels’ – see Psalm 8:5–8, Heb. 2:7. In these two passages it is said that everything is put under his feet which is of this world, including the whole animal kingdom. It is implied from Hebrews 2:5 that even the world to come was to be under his feet, as of believers it is said they ‘shall reign upon the earth’ as a ‘kingdom of priests’ (Rev. 5:10). In this sense man is said to be higher than the angels (cf. Heb. 2:5) for they are ‘ministering spirits sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation’. See Heb. 6:13. Ultimately men are to judge angels (I Cor. 6:3). In fact they are to judge the world (I Cor. 6:3, cf. Dan. 7:18, 22–27).

Man is given power over all creatures because he has named them (Gen. 2: 19–20 cf. 1:28ff, 9:2–3). He even wrestles with principalities and powers (Ephes. 6:12) and Satan, when resisted by him will flee, for he overcomes even Satan (I Peter 5:8–9, James 4:7, I John 2:13f, cf. Rev. 12:11).

3. The Purpose of Authority

When we recognise that all authority comes from God, we realise that the purpose of authority is ultimately the purpose or purposes of God. That He has a plan and purpose is in no doubt as we see from Ephes. 1:3–14, 3:9–11, II Tim. 1:9, Rom. 16:25, I Cor. 2:6f, I Peter 1:19–20, Rev. 13:8. This plan has always been told (Amos 3:7, Gen. 18:17, Jer. 23:22, Dan. 9:22, Rev. 10:7, Acts 3:21, cf. Luke 1:70).

We generally think of authority as being static, that we see it as upholding the status quo. Hence we do not think of its purposes as other than that. History, however, cannot be seen except in the light of its dynamic (creative) purposeful beginning, and its ultimate dynamic conclusion – the end things which are so well described in Romans 8:18–30. Hence authorities are not there to uphold a static status quo, but to uphold the dynamic order of God. For example a study of Psalms 19 and 119 will show the powerful nature of law. When this is related to passages such as James 1:22–25,

2:8–11, Romans 13:11, Gal. 5:13 it will be seen that law is the outshining of God's nature, and the mode by which man truly operates as man. Psalm 19:7–14 should be read at this point, whilst the virtues of the law should be experienced from Psalm 119. The attitude to law as seen in Psalm 1 and Romans 7:22 will be exactly the attitude of one to authority, for the two are inseparable. However, we repeat that law should not primarily be seen as constricting and inhibitive legislation, so much as the functional principles by which man may live, and which, in essence when obeyed willingly are the very actions of love itself.

Had there been no rebellion against authority by Satan and his hosts (Rev. 12:1f), and man (Gen. 3:1–6) then the law, or authority would have only been viewed as the operations of God's love. Guilt alters the true view of authority and law. Hence in I Tim. 1:8–10 Paul says, 'Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine. Hence Paul says in Romans 13:4 that the authority ordained by God 'is God's servant for your good'. That is, authority is only ever for good. Even to punish evil doers is for good. Paul goes on to say that one ought to obey, not only to avoid God's wrath, but 'also for the sake of conscience' meaning that conscience tells a man that he ought to do the good, and not the evil.

To return to the wider purpose – the whole creation was brought into being to glorify God (Ephes. 1:3–14, Isa. 43:6–7, etc.). The salvation of sinful creatures was not an afterthought, but God's fore-thought. Hence all powers that be were designed to fulfil God's will. In this sense authority is dynamically purposeful. What matters most in all the universe is the will of God, and its accomplishment (Ephes. 5:17).

4. The Full Operation of True Authority

God is Father. His purpose in history is to produce His family, whereby He, as 'the Father of glory' will show forth His glory in His sons, in His family. See Ephes. 3:14f, 1:4–7, Rev. 7:9ff., Rom. 8:18–30, I John 3:1–3, Gal. 4:4–6.

The Son is the Eternal Son, who creates with the Father, who is incarnate that he may lead men to the Father. Col. 1:15–17, Heb. 1:2–3, John 1:1–3, 14–16, 18, 14:6–10, Matt. 11:27.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God who is at once the Agent of the Father and the Son, in His plan.

All Living creatures, celestial and terrestrial are created for God's glory, to participate in His plan, by their obedience. The 'sons of God' at the dawn of creation 'shouted for joy', as they saw the first action of God's plan, Job 38:7.

Part of this creaturely creation has rebelled. Hence it has rejected the true nature of God, and so His plan and purpose. It has also rejected the true nature of the universe. Rom. 1:19–32. Hence it rejects authority. It rejects the true nature of law. It seeks to establish its own authorities, its own laws, its own purpose and plans. Nevertheless God turns the wrath of man (and Satan) to His own praise. He incorporates all things to achieve His own ends. It was ever so in His mind and intention. Cf. Psalm 76:10, Exod. 9:16, Rom. 9:17, 8:28–30.

(i) The Full Revelation of True Authority and True Obedience

The archetypal pattern of fatherhood is the Fatherhood of God. The archetypal pattern of sonship is the Sonship of the Son. The archetypal pattern of brotherhood, is the Brother-being of Jesus (Hebrews 2:11f). God is essentially Father; the Son is essentially Son. True authority resides in God as Father; true obedience in the Son as Son. This is demonstrated in the incarnation of the Word, who is the Son (John 1:1–3, 14, Hebrews 1:2–3).

The true operation of submission to authority is total obedience. Jesus alone, of all men, ever offered total obedience to the Father. Total love is also, at the same time, total obedience. This is seen from a close study of the following Scriptures. John 3:35, Matt. 11:27, John 5:19–29, cf. John 10: 17–18, 14:30–31, cf. Col. 1:13. See also John 17:1–5, 24. The following picture emerges from these and kindred Scriptures:

(a) The Father loves the Son, and gives all things (of His authority) into his hands.

(b) The Son loves the Father and obeys Him. He does nothing but what the Father shows him. He does only the will of God. His love and obedience are the one as he seeks to fulfil the Father's will.

(c) He is obedient to incarnation (Phil. 2:5f.). He is obedient to life (John 5:19ff, 17:1–5). He is obedient to death (Phil. 2:8, John 10:17–18). He is obedient to resurrection (John 10:17–18).

We conclude that his obedience is the obedience which a true son renders to his true father. This is the true order in the universe of (a) Authority and (b) Obedience. We must not understand love and obedience as being apart, one from the other (I John 5:3 cf. 2:3–6).

True sonship is also obedient to the Spirit of God (Luke 4:1, 14, cf. Acts 10:38, Luke 4:17 ff.). Romans 8:14 states the general principle.

(ii) Fallen Man – His Rejection of Authority; Obedience Alien to Him

The initial obedience of man to God was that of creature to Creator, son to Father, Servant to his Lord. His aspiration to be 'as God' perverted his relationship of obedience which would have been one of love (see I John 5:3, 2:3–6, etc.). Man, now, is incapable of understanding obedience. He is incapable of understanding the true nature of law. He cannot love God, nor can he be truly subject to the universal law of God.

What has to be understood is that the law is written on all men's hearts (Romans 2:14–15), and they know that the breaking of it is death (Rom. 1:32). True obedience, then is not possible for man. Romans 7:14–23 speaks of redeemed man who desires to be obedient, but finds that of himself he has no power to accomplish such obedience. However the fallen person has no desire for obedience; in fact he does not understand its nature. He does however recognise, in many ways, the need to conform to laws, and even to 'establish his own righteousness' (Rom. 10:1–3). Rightly understood guilty man always seeks to justify himself. He does this by various means, e.g. denigrating law as such, as though it does not have validity; criticising others, thus off-loading his own guilt; doing various works which whilst not those actually required by God resemble the sort of thing God requires; denigrating the Lawgiver Who is God, by showing that His lawsystem is absurd, since He Himself is not a trustworthy Creator, this because there are so many anomalies in His creation.

(iii) Redemption – the Way to Obedience and Recovered Authority

Christ offers to God the total filial obedience required of the Son by the Father:– John 10:17–18, 14:30–31, cf. John 4:34, 9:1–3, 8:28, etc. In this obedience he covers the sins of man by bearing them, becoming them and receiving the wrath due to them:– I Peter 2:24, 3:18, II Cor. 5:21, I John 4:10, Rom. 3:24. Because of this man is justified, that is his sins are not imputed to him, and so reconciliation is made with God. Man again becomes subject to God (Rom. 5:1, 8:1, II Cor. 5:14–21). The love of God grips him (I John 4:10, 19) and by love he now obeys God (Luke 7:47, John 14: 15, 21–23, II Cor. 5:14, etc.).

His love is not only that of the grateful sinner who has been acquitted of guilt, but of the son who has been accepted by the Father (Gal. 4:4–6). He is now in filial relationship with his Father. This accords with the relationship of the Son to the Father. Moreover he is part of the family of God (Ephes. 2:18, 21). He is freed from the bondage of sin (John 8:34–36), and in fact the other forms of evil which have held him in his state of rebellion (Cf. Rom. 1:31, Col. 1:21, Rom. 5:10, Titus 3:3, etc.). The drag of guilt and domination being lifted from him, he can now be restored to his true humanity, and so his full relationships with God, his universe (including his neighbour) and himself. Love and obedience – which are the one – now become the order and pattern of his life.

Regeneration, which is the renewal of man to his former state, implies not only a recovery of powers lost through guilt and alienation from God, as also through subjugation to evil, but it also implies the new bent to obedience. Man becomes truly himself only in the context of voluntary obedience, for it was for this he was created. He is a free creature only when he gladly submits to the will of God, and so follows that created order of His universe.

5. The Kingdom of God: Authority and Obedience

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven are, in fact, the one. They are called this to distinguish God's Kingdom from that of Satan and of fallen man, as also to distinguish the rule of heaven, rather than the rule of the world. The Kingdom of God is simply His reign over His universe. This covers His plan for history, and which is, in fact history as this world experiences it, although of course it does not as such recognise it. It also covers His creation of the universe, and the modes of authority and required obedience which He puts within it.

In this sense God has ever been King, albeit Satan and his hosts have rebelled, and man has also entered into that rebellion. Satan, the arch-rebel, is joined by man, and such men are called 'the children of disobedience', and are of their 'father the devil'. They do 'his lusts and his desires'. This reveals the fact that man must give obedience to something or someone (cf. John 8:44f., I John 3:10ff., and Romans 5:17ff.). In regard to the operations of his will he cannot remain as a suspended creature, i.e. not giving obedience to someone.

The Kingdom of God then must be seen after the following order:

- (a) God is King over all the earth because He is Creator.
- (b) His rule has been opposed by rebellious forces, but that this alters nothing of the essential nature of the universe, although the creation has been subjected to frustration through futility, since it cannot directly fulfil its functional operation (Rom. 8:18ff.).
- (c) The Kingdom is coming to its ultimate successful climax because Christ

has come and broken the power of disobedience and evil, and has asserted the rule of God, as man who has triumphed over Satan, the world system, the world powers, sin, and death.

(d) The outworking of his triumph is an historical process which will conclude by the conclusive defeat and judgement of evil, and the setting up of the Kingdom. At this time – the end–time – the full authority of God will be absolute, and disobedience will be sealed off, for His Kingdom will have come ‘on earth as it is in heaven’.

The Kingdom and its authority must then be seen as follows:

- (i) **It is purposive**, i.e. God has its ultimate end of triumph, including the harmony of all things (cf. Col. 1:13, Ephes. 1:9–11, Col. 1:20–21, Ephes. 4:10 etc. with Rev. 21:1–7) as His goal, that is when His family of created beings celestial and terrestrial – will be before Him in obedience.
- (ii) **It is functional**. That is, there are laws to the Kingdom, which are functional. These relate to God as King, His Son, the other authorities, and the true reign of God accords where there is obedience. This functioning of the Kingdom is constant.
- (iii) **It is processive**. That is, the Kingdom is never static, a system which is closed, and is thus a structure which is an end in itself. Rather, God has purposed to glorify His children, and complete His family (e.g. Rom. 8:18–30, Ephes. 1:4–14, etc.), and so creation, redemption, and the restitution of all things are part of the process, which despite the appearance of things which appear to be to the contrary, is proceeding, progressively to fulfil the purpose of God. Hence we say the Kingdom is dynamic. We need not take the operation of evil too seriously, since God has incorporated them into His plan.

6. The Son, Christ and The Issues of Authority and Obedience

The Kingdom of God is also known as ‘the Kingdom of the Son of His love’. In Luke 22:29 Jesus says that his Father has appointed a Kingdom for him, and in Matt. 16:28 speaks about the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom. In II Peter 1:11 it is called ‘the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’ See also Rev. 1:9, 11:15. This means that the Son has been appointed over the Kingdom. Yet it is with a view to vindicating the authority of the Father, for I Cor. 15:24–28 speaks of the kingdom of the world being subjected to the Son who turns and gives it to the Father that ‘God may be all in all.’ Likewise when every knee ultimately bows to hi–Lordship (Phil. 2:9–11) it is to ‘the glory of the Father’.

(i) The Authority of the Son

In Matt. 28:18 Jesus says ‘All authority is given to me in heaven and earth’. This means that all authorities, celestial and terrestrial are vested in him. This corresponds with the concepts of John 3:35, Matt. 11:27, John 5: 19–29. As Son of Man, operating in the interests and powers of the Kingdom (N.B. the Kingdom is always dynamic) does so under the Holy Spirit as we see in Acts 10:38, Matt. 12:28 etc. As Son of Man he has authority over the Sabbath, to forgive the sin of man, to cast out demons, to heal, and so on. However, by the Cross and Resurrection he is accorded the full power over the creation (cf. Hebrews 2:5–17), and receives this at his ascension. He is the one of Psalm 2 who is Messiah (‘his anointed’), King, and Son. All the nations are given to him in accordance with Gen. 49:10, cf. Romans 1:5, 15:18 and 16:25–26. To him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

The eternal Son, by reason of his creating all things ‘things in heaven, things on earth, things visible and invisible, principalities, dominions and powers’ is by his eternal nature Lord of all things. However, by conquest as man, he is Lord over all things. It is the Man who rules all things. That is, there is no authority which is not vested in him. Hence he controls powers of evil, as well as those of God. Thus in Rev. 5:1ff., it is the Lamb that has been slain who is worthy (has the authority) to open the seals, and to unloose the scroll. We mean he is the one in whom, and by whom, the actions of history happen. Powers of evil are given authority to do what they do, only by him. Passages such as Rev. 6:8, 9:3, 13:7 (exousia) indicate that God gives power to these evil beings up to the point where He desires they accomplish His will in judgements. In Rev. 16:9 it is apparent that God has authority over the plagues. Rev. 18:1 shows angels have authority given to them. In Luke 22:53 Jesus tells the soldiers from the Temple that it is their hour and ‘the authority of darkness.’ Likewise he tells Pilate that he could do nothing, unless authority were given to him (John 19:8–11, cf. 18:36). In all this we see that evil, for all its rebellion can still not go beyond the authority given by God, and this authority becomes that of the Son of God’s appointment, and Jesus’ victory.

The practical outworking of this authority of the Son is as follows:

- (a) He now heads up the fulfilling of the Father’s will (I Cor. 15:24–28, cf. Rev. 11:15).
- (b) The Father’s will is to unify and harmonise all things (Ephes. 1:9–11 4:10, Col. 1:21 etc.).
- (c) It is to destroy all evil (I John 3:8 cf. Rev. 18:22). To do this Christ reigns, now, over all things, and directs his actions towards the goals of the Father. Thus all under his rule are called to share through obedience in the plan of God. Christ controls evil, and directs, authorises and empowers all good in regard to the Father’s planned goal.

(ii) The Son and the Sons: The Practical Issues of Human Obedience

What we must now come to see is that the essential unity of all things, which is to be fully climaxed and consummated, exists in its present form by reason of authority. In Ephesians 4:1–6 we see that the unity is that of the Holy Spirit. However it demands the Lordship of Christ; all things are banded together under him, and are subject to him. Cf. Romans 14:7ff, Acts 2:36, 10:36, II Cor. 4:4, Rom. 10:9, I Cor. 12:3, Rev. 19:15 etc. At the same time it is the father who is ‘above all, and through all, and in all’. That is, the Father is above all things, being head of His family (patria) in heaven and earth. He is the supreme authority. Yet He is also in and through His family. That family is under the Lordship of His Son. We now turn to see the very practical issues of sonship and obedience.

(a) The Son loves the Father and is Obedient to Him.

We have seen that obedience and love are one and the same thing. The Son loves the Father and obeys Him. Out of this primary relationship of Son to Father, issue all other relationships. Hence the Son is truly Brother, and uses that functional authority to redeem his brethren (Heb. 2:11f). He is the true Bridegroom, and uses that authority to redeem his Bride, and to have her subject to him and his love (Ephes. 5:22ff.)

(b) The True Sons Love the Father and are Obedient to Him

Men come to be the sons of God when they are given authority to do so (John 1:12). They come through the Son (John 14:6, 1:12, Gal. 3:26, 4:4–6). Now they must love the Father, and so do His will. As the Son delights to do the will of God, so should the sons.

(c) Obedience to the Father (God) Demands Obedience to Human Fatherhood. In practice the test–point of obedience to God lies in obedience to the earthly father.

Obedience to parents is enjoined; honouring and obeying are one (cf. Mal. 1:6, 2:10). True obedience (love) to God will issue in love to the father. I John 4:20 says that if a man says he loves God and hates his brother he is a liar. The test of love is obedience; the test of obedience is love. Brotherhood (as against fatherhood) is a secondary relationship; fatherhood is the primary one. It is so in the universe (Ephes. 3:14, 4:6), and is so in human affairs. Hence not to love your brother is not to love (obey) God. Likewise not to love your father (obey him) is not to love (obey) God. When one does not obey the Father (and so, the father), one is virtually at variance with the authorities of the universe. The true Son is wholly subject to the Father; hence the true sons will be subject to the Father, i.e. to their fathers.

The problem which arises here is the imperfection of earthly fathers, as against the perfection of the (heavenly) Father. The answer to this is that every authority is instituted by God. To refuse to obey such (every authority) is to refuse to obey God. This can be seen when Christ is viewed as the elder brother (Rom. 8:30). As such he exercises functional authority in the family (Heb. 2:11–17). Hence when a son will not obey the father, he can scarcely be a true older brother to the young, nor a submissive younger brother to the older. This of course will affect all relationships, since all relationships stem from that of the Son to the Father, hence of sons to fathers.

As the Son loves and obeys the Father's will, and so the Father's will is done (fulfilled) so those who relate to the Father will obey and fulfil His will, the test and proof of which is that they obey the father's will. If again it be objected that human fathers are imperfect, and that children are hurt (made resentful, given wrong images of the Father, etc.) then it must be said that not only must the father love the child, but the child the father. It is no excuse that because the father (the authority) does not rightly exercise his office, that the office should be rejected, and (more to the point) the Giver of the Office rejected, but that love should win through in this situation, since true love 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things'.

7. The Restoration of Authority and Obedience

We have seen that through the Cross the doom of evil powers is sealed, and that, at the end time, this doom will be finally executed. We have seen that all authorities given to celestial and terrestrial powers are a mandate from God for positive operations which accord with the overall authority of the Father. Those who misuse or abuse such authority will be judged accordingly. Hence in this sense authority does not have to be restored.

In the sense that men have rebelled against authority, such authority does have to be restored, that is the universe must come (willingly) under obedience to the Father. What concerns us is that the finally impenitent celestial and terrestrial powers will be subdued and suffer judgement and punishment. Further than this we are concerned as to the modes by which men will come willingly under the authority of God. We suggest the following modes:

- (a) Man must repent of his rebellion against the authority of God, and the orders of authorities which God has placed in the universe. He must also see his rebellious attitude (or nature) as evil, and repent of it. He must take responsibility for such acts and attitudes and blame no other for them, this being true repentance.
- (b) He must recognise that all his guilts and rebellious nature have been totally dealt with at (and, on) the Cross. He must see his guilts for past wrong acts, his hatred of authorities – primarily his father and mother – have also been destroyed. He is free now to relate to all men, and authorities, because he has been released, through forgiveness, from all bondages.
- (c) He too must forgive where there has been hurt, resentment etc. When he forgives man he truly loves God, and so truly loves man, and himself. (Cf. Matt. 18:21ff.). If he will not forgive then he cannot truly be free.
- (d) He must now submit to every authority, and this means to love and to obey. This will affect every relationship. His submission must be in love i.e. true obedience. cf. Ephes. 5:20ff. Within the Family of God true authority is both known and obeyed. Hence relationships are excellent. In these, and by these one matures as a full person.
- (e) In submitting he must now obey the will of God, which is on the one hand the principles (or, laws) of the Kingdom, and on the other is doing that which God has set for him as his particular part in the whole plan of God.
- (f) The effect of this obedience is that he will now have true authority. In Luke 7:1–10 the story of the centurion who had a sick servant is told. The centurion says 'I, also, am a man under authority I say to one soldier 'go!' and he goes; to another 'Come!' and he comes; to another 'Do!' and he does. You speak the word and my servant will be healed.' He meant, 'Because I am under authority I can speak with authority. I perceive you are thus.' Thus to be under the Father is to be a true son. To be under the husband is to be a true wife. Jesus was the true Son. He obeyed the Father, and had all the authority of the Father.

8. Conclusion

We recognise from Romans 1:19–32 (cf. Gen. 3:1–6, 4:1ff.) that the distress of the universe comes from failure to obey. True obedience springs from love, and is love. Disobedience springs from pride and constitutes hate. Relationships which are full are destroyed. Hence the new obedience which springs from love, restores true authority within the universe, since it restores relationships and guarantees the unity of the family. Submitted to the Father and the Son, men and women will submit to true authorities and hence exercise authority in the realms to which they have been appointed. Thus God's plan will be fulfilled His 'will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' Hence obedience will be seen, not as a grievous grind, but as a joyous exercise, and indeed the true meaning of being fully human.