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BEING GODS OR BEING GOD'S

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Post-modern and feminist theologians have been leading an assault on authority. They complain that biblical tradition reflects a hierarchical view of the world. Moreover they argue that because men have dominated this hierarchy then Christianity is a man-made religion (man meaning male). Of course Christians will not accept this last point and assert that our faith is God-given, not man-made. But we have to concede that the first point is true. We believe in the complete authority of God and this is fundamental to our faith. We recognise further that there is a God-given order and hierarchy in what God has made which reflects this sovereignty. Recognising this C S Lewis wrote 'I believe the authority of parent over child, husband over wife, learned over simple, to have been as much a part of the original plan as the authority of man over beast.'

Many today see hierarchy and authority as part of the human condition which is evolving, but biblical Christians believe that fallen humanity is constantly seeking to replace the legitimate authority of God: 'we will not have this man to rule over us' (Luke 19:14). As a replacement for God some seek authority in institutions which are felt to be just, unshakeable and certain. Others seek authority in particular gurus such as Carl Marx, L Ron Hubbard or even Eileen Drewry. We recognise our own internal uncertainties and therefore are attracted especially by those who appear to have a special key of knowledge. In contrast others seek authority solely in themselves. Of course there are many subtleties and variants on these views but all are part of the underlying quest to find authority without acknowledging the God who made us.

In the face of all this we must be bold in declaring that authority ultimately rests in God and God alone (Rom 13:1). In the end we will all have to recognise this before the throne of God, but we should pray that people will recognise it sooner rather than later. Any other authority is only transitory, it is like the morning mist and will disappear in the light of eternity. But, as we noted in the quote from C S Lewis, there is other authority which derives from the will of God. It is therefore right (1 Peter 2:13) to accept the authority of parents, rulers, husband and so on, but God remains sovereign and our ultimate allegiance is to him.

The authority of God should be seen in terms of all three persons of the Trinity. The authority of the Son is a subject which repays further reflection but which we can only mention in passing here. In the gospels we see how Jesus had authority over all of creation, spiritual and physical, both matter and people. This last point is vital for Jesus has authority over all people whether they recognise it or not.

The authority of the Holy Spirit is seen in two specific ways. Firstly, it is He who makes the authority of God living and real for us and without the indwelling and quickening of the Holy Spirit we cannot truly recognise or live under the authority of God. In this work the Holy Spirit has a special role in illuminating the Scriptures, as He does so it is the author of the Word who speaks and applies the Word to us individually. It is because Scripture is God-breathed (literally God-spirited 1 Tim 3.16) that it too has authority: it is God speaking to us. If God were capricious then we could not necessarily trust Him, but by faith we believe that God is trustworthy and true, characteristics which

were revealed in the Son of God. Therefore we accept God's word as trustworthy and true, to be obeyed for our salvation.

Preaching before the despotic Henry VIII, the great Reformer said aloud to himself:

*“Latimer, Latimer, be careful what you say the King of England is here.
Latimer, Latimer, be careful what you say the King of Kings is here.”*