

OUR PROBLEM WITH AUTHORITY

“NOBODY TELLS ME WHAT TO DO!”

How many times have you heard someone say that?

How many times have you said it yourself?

We say it because we have a problem with authority.

In fact, we have such a problem with it that sometimes we feel justified in rebelling against it—especially when we think we can get away with it.

And if we do succeed in getting away with it we're proud of ourselves because there's something in us that admires rebels.

Some of our biggest folk heroes are rebels.

The Scots cherish the memory of William Wallace and Rob Roy McGregor,

The Irish revere Michael Collins and Charles Stewart Parnell.

The Poles, Lech Walensa.

We Americans have a special affection for rebels since our founding fathers were rebels.

In fact our country was founded on the greatest testimonial to rebellion ever written: the *Declaration of Independence*.

America was forged in revolution and the rebel mentality is one we all esteem.

Do you know who the first rebel in history was?

Satan.

Satan was an angel who rebelled against God's rule over heaven and earth!

And like all rebels, the first thing he did was to seek followers.

He looked for them among angels and according to the *Book of Revelation*, persuaded about one third of them to follow him.

He also looked for them among mankind beginning with the very first humans: Adam and Eve.

God had created Adam and Eve and placed them on earth as stewards to rule in His place.

He had made them in His image and had given them the Godlike qualities of intelligence, language, and

moral discernment, so that they could rule in a Godlike way.

He had also given them one command and that was to refrain from acquiring the knowledge of evil.

So of course that is exactly where Satan struck when he went to recruit them.

By sowing seeds of mistrust and resentment in Eve's mind, he awakened a rebel spirit in her and set her against God.

He convinced her that instead of *resting* in God's authority and knowledge, she should rebel against it.

“God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Translation: *“God doesn't want YOU to enjoy HIS privileges. He wants you to know less than He does. But you deserve to know as much as He does. And you can...”*

It was an effective ploy. It worked—and it still does.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command it was not just simple rebellion: it was more like treason.

God had made them stewards of his entire creation: they were his executors, his administrators, his caretakers or vicegerants.

When they rebelled, they violated a sacred trust—like the officers of Enron and Worldcom several years ago who stole the wealth of thousands of shareholders to satisfy their personal greed.

But Adam and Eve's rebellion did far more than destroy two companies and impoverish a lot of people; it plunged creation itself into chaos.

Harmony was replaced by dissonance, truth was replaced by lies, and life was cut short by death.

The price of their rebellion was very high.

Still, rebellion has been popular throughout history.

And it has never flourished more than it does today.

Perhaps nothing so distinguishes our age as rebellion against authority.

Distrust of civil authorities—the police, the judicial system, the government at all levels—is rampant and has reduced voters to a rebellious mixture of apathy and impotent rage.

The authority of educators at all levels has been undermined as their powers of enforcement have been stripped away from them one by one.

Disruptive behavior among students cannot be restrained nor can poor academic performance be punished in any meaningful way.

The authority of public schoolteachers is routinely challenged by students and parents alike and the morale of teachers is at an all time low.

In the circles of higher education, many of the members of the faculties have responded by simply addicating their positions of authority and joined with the students in their juvenile rebellion.

At some of America's premier universities—Harvard and Yale for example—antisemitic demonstrations are not only allowed but encouraged in the name of “academic freedom.”

Ecclesiastical authority is all but a thing of the past.

The American bishops of the Roman Catholic Church openly criticize the decisions coming out of Rome and then wonder why their parishioners ignore their instructions regarding birth control and abortion.

Episcopal bishops defy the decisions of their Anglican superiors and threaten schism.

Pastors of Protestant denominations are accorded only as much authority as they can personally

cultivate in the minds of their parishioners: very little authority accrues to the office they hold.

Parents' authority is called into question by civil authorities and even challenged by children themselves.

Perhaps the most frightening form of rebellion in the contemporary world is popular revolt against the moral law itself.

A sizeable number of the so-called intelligentsia of our time have mounted an attack on the idea that there even IS such a thing as objective morality.

Right and wrong, they say, are relative terms and can only be assessed in terms of individual experiences and social environments.

According to these postmodernists, ethical codes and social values are formed subjectively out of personal experience and cultural influence and are therefore all morally equivalent: you have your morals and I have mine but who's to say which one is superior to the other?

This philosophy has helped elevate the idea of personal moral choice into a sacrament; privacy rights are considered more important than moral responsibility or even social stability.

The result is moral and social decay.

The place where adults have to deal with authority more than anywhere else is the workplace.

As the saying goes, everyone has a boss.

When I left academia, I went to work as a laborer in a factory.

I worked third shift for A. O. Smith, a manufacturer of parts for automobiles.

My foreman's name (I'll never forget it) was Jim Kotas—a big, stern guy who was serious about getting out production.

He put me to work on a two-stage punch press that was about two stories high.

We molded quarter-inch plate steel control arms for Chryslers.

It was physically tough, exhausting work, and it was relentless.

When you finished feeding the parts from one bin, there was Homer Schultz waiting on his tow motor with a fresh bin full of new parts to be processed.

You never had to wait long for more work.

I hated it.

I wasn't good at it and I HATED it.

My boss's method of supervising was to walk by my work station every hour or so and stop and stare at me until I looked back at him.

Then he would do this: which meant, "Faster."

It wasn't long before I began to hate him too.

He hadn't done anything wrong or treated me unfairly, but he had authority over me and I resented it to the depths of my soul.

Thank God I got laid off about three months after I went to work there or I would have gone crazy.

Later I ended up in management at another company and had to learn how to supervise people who worked for me.

I learned how different an organization looks to someone who has been invested with authority in it.

Some managers over-used their authority, others were afraid of using it at all, and still others wanted to use it but didn't know how.

Authority, as it turns out, is a tricky thing.

If you overuse it, your subordinates will learn to hate you and if you don't use it enough they will disrespect you.

In a fallen world, authority is a difficult thing to deal with—from either end of the spectrum.

You might say that if Eve's sin was to rebel against God's authority, Adam's sin was to fail to use the authority God had given him to save both his and Eve's lives.

Because men are rebels at heart, God has established institutions in society to keep rebellious behavior in check: government, schools, parents, police, and the moral law itself.

Rebellion against these institutions and laws is kept in check by the threat of punishment against those who rebel against them.

In Biblical language, "*Caesar does not bear the sword in vain.*"

When that sword is blunted—or withdrawn—authority crumbles along with it.

Responsible government degenerates into political theatrics, educators are forced to become salesmen to their student-customers rather than authorities, parents pathetically try to be friends to their children

rather than wield parental authority; pastors give up being watchmen and try to be buddies to their congregants and the moral law dissolves into moral anarchy.

We can see this happening on many fronts in our society today.

This should come as no surprise.

Paul wrote to Timothy: *“There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...”*

As the Bible clearly tells us, the kingdom of his world is not destined for utopia; it is destined for destruction.

The witness of Scripture is clear on this point and every Christian needs to know it.

But thanks be to God, there is another kingdom--a kingdom that is gradually replacing the kingdom of this world!

It is called the Kingdom of God and its King is Jesus Christ, Who inaugurated His Kingdom on the cross

and ascended to its throne when He rose from the dead.

What is so different and so wonderful about this Kingdom is that it completely reverses the structure of authority in the kingdom of this world.

In the kingdom of this world, authority flows from top to down but in the Kingdom of God, authority flows up from the bottom to the top.

In the Kingdom of this world those with power and authority rule; in the Kingdom of God, those who serve and humble themselves rule.

Those who are the least in this world are great and those who are great in this world are least.

In the Kingdom of this world, the strong and powerful call the shots; in the Kingdom of God, the meek inherit the earth.

To put it as simply as possible, in the Kingdom of God, the sword of Caesar is replaced by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We have a lot to worry about in this world.

We struggle with authority: we overuse it, we underuse it, and we rebel against it.

But it doesn't matter!

We do the best we can and we ask God to forgive the rest and we rest secure in the fact that though the kingdom of this world is passing away, the Kingdom of God is our true and eternal home.

Amen.

