



What does the Scripture say?

God's Authority and Hope for the Church 1 Timothy 1:1

Introduction:

Everyone lives under some authority whether we want to admit it or not.

I remember preaching to a gathering of young people in Romania in the early 1990's. After the message, I shared the Gospel with a young man, but he refused to surrender his life to Christ. When I asked him why he wouldn't give his life to Jesus, he said that he had lived his life under the rule of a dictator, and now he wanted to rule his own life.

At this point I shared with him that every person must choose who they will submit their lives to; there is no such thing as living completely without authority in our lives. I illustrated my point with a well-known example. I explained that a person can choose to be a slave of a toothbrush so they can be free from cavities, or they can be free from a toothbrush and be a slave to cavities. But no one can be free from both a toothbrush and cavities.

The spiritual parallel to this obvious: We can surrender to Christ as Lord and be free from the slavery of sin, or we can reject the Lordship of Christ and fall prey to sin's deadly dominion (Romans 6:16, 23).

As a Church – a Body of Believers – we want to acknowledge God's authority and hope for the Church. Paul deals with these two themes as he introduces himself more specifically to us in 1 Timothy 1:1. This is supremely important for us to understand and embrace because our desire as Believers in the Body of Christ is to submit to and follow the Head of the Body, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18). We clearly acknowledge God's authority over the Church and God's offer of hope in and through Christ alone.

1. God's Authority Over the Church

While there is much which can be said about the life of Paul from the New Testament, Paul introduces himself to us as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior." We can break-down this statement into two basic parts.

To begin with, Paul was "an apostle of Christ Jesus." The word "apostle" is really a title. At the core of this word's meaning is the idea of someone who was sent on a mission. Jesus gave this title to twelve of His disciples (Luke 6:13). Of course, Judas eventually betrayed Christ and committed suicide (Matthew 27:3-5). So Peter took the initiative to find a replacement for Judas in Acts 1:12-26. Peter emphasized that the replacement apostle should be someone who was a witness to Jesus' earthly ministry and a witness to Jesus' resurrection.



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We mention this because Paul had to deal with people on occasion who questioned his apostleship (1 Corinthians 9; 2 Corinthians 11). Yet, he persuasively defended his apostleship by pointing to the fact that he witnessed the resurrected Christ and by pointing to his fruitfulness in ministry.

Therefore, he next mentions that he is an apostle “by the command of God” (*NIV*, 1984). The *NASB* translates 1 Timothy 1:1 here as “an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior.” The word translated “command” (*NIV*, 1984) and “commandment” (*NASB*) can also be translated “authority” which seems to be the primary thrust of Paul’s words. Paul is underscoring for us at the outset of his letter to Timothy that he is an apostle by the authority of God our Savior. With this being said, he is confessing God’s supreme authority over the Church, and Paul is also urging us to accept his letter as God’s inspired message to the Church.

While no apostle had a special status by virtue of who they were as human beings, they were used by God in special ways at the beginning of the Church’s existence to build a solid foundation of orthodox teaching/theology and leadership. For example, in Acts 2:42, after the Church was born on the day of Pentecost, the early Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.” In Acts 6:2, “the Twelve [apostles] gathered all the disciples together” and provided ministry leadership for the expanding Church. In Acts 8:14, when the Gospel spread to Samaria, “the apostles in Jerusalem . . . sent Peter and John to them.” In Acts 10 and 11, God sent Peter to first preach to Cornelius, the Gentile, and then to defend this ministry move to others. In Acts 15, the apostles played a pivotal role in helping the Church as a whole understand the truth that salvation is through Christ alone and not by works, such as circumcision.

Although other examples can be given concerning how God used the apostles as His emissaries with His authority to provide leadership for the early Church, perhaps Paul’s words in **Ephesians 2:19-20** provide a good summary statement: “*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*” It’s clear from these verses that Christ is the “chief cornerstone” of the Church; the “apostles” are simply foundational in the sense that God used them as His emissaries to spread the truth of the Gospel and its teachings in the early stages of the Church’s existence.

For this reason, the term “apostle” uniquely refers to those select early followers of Christ whom God chose to serve Him in this special time and way. While the term may generally be applied to some today who serve the Church with spiritual gifts of Church planting and missionary work, no one in the Church today can claim to speak an “inspired” message from God with authority as the first apostles did. God gave those men alone His authority in that special sense.



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The reason why this discussion on Paul's God-given authority is important for us today in the Church is because we desire to submit to God's authority as He has revealed His true teachings to us in the Scripture. In other words, we really want to be "people of the Book" – the Word of God. We don't worship Paul in any sense, but we do acknowledge that God inspired him in his writings and instructions for the Church. We want to be like the Believers in Thessalonica when Paul described the way they received his message and ministry in **1 Thessalonians 2:13**, "*And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*"

God has spoken to us through His Word. Paul later writes in **2 Timothy 3:16-17** that "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" We are not interested in trying to develop our plans for the Church; we are interested in God's plans for the Church as He has revealed in His Word. We are not interested in accommodating cultural trends for the Church; we want everything we do to fit squarely within the perimeters of the authority of God's Word because we submit to God's sole authority over the Church. This is why it's important for us to acknowledge Paul as an apostle by God's authority because it reminds us that when we read his letter to Timothy, we are really reading God's authoritative directions for His Church since He is our Savior through Jesus Christ, our hope.

2. God's Hope for the Church

The fact that Paul refers to God as "our Savior" and next mentions "Christ Jesus our hope" serves to reinforce why we submit completely to God's authority. Simply put: God has total rights over our lives because He not only created us but also saved us through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ who is our hope.

While God is called the "Savior" in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 22:3; 1 Chronicles 16:35; Psalm 18:46; Isaiah 43:3; Hosea 13:4; Micah 7:7; Habakkuk 3:18), He is also called our "Savior" in the New Testament as well. For example, Paul calls God "our Savior" in 1 Timothy 2:3, "the Savior of all men" in 1 Timothy 4:10, and "our Savior" in Titus 1:3; 2:10; and 3:4.

We can clearly see why God is called "our Savior" because after Paul describes our spiritual death in sin, he writes in **Ephesians 2:4b-5** that "*God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.*" Here we can see Paul link the idea of God as our Savior with Christ who is our life.



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This link in Ephesians 2:4b-5 helps us easily understand Paul's link in 1 Timothy 1:1 in terms of God being our Savior and Christ Jesus being our hope. **John 3:16-18** tells us, *"For so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."*

Again, God saves us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is our only hope. He says later in **John 14:6b**, *"I am the way and the truth and the life: No one comes to the Father except through me."* Paul himself later writes in **1 Timothy 2:3-6**, *"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time."*

As we can clearly see here, there is only "one mediator between God and men." It's not a priest today or an apostle from centuries past. It's Jesus Christ alone. He is the only One who died for our sins and rose again to give us eternal life. God's salvation is only possible through Christ and His finished work. All who repent and believe, surrendering their life to Christ's Lordship by God's grace and by the power of His Spirit, receive God's free gift of eternal life in and through Jesus Christ. For this reason, God is our Savior, and Christ Jesus is our hope.

Paul experienced God's gracious salvation through Christ. This is why he wrote about how God saved him and called him into ministry near the beginning of his letter to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:12-17. We, along with Paul, bow to God's authority over the Church because He is our Savior, and we, along with Paul, completely and joyfully surrender our lives to Christ's Lordship because He is our hope, the Head of the Body of Christ.

Conclusion:

As we read through the Scriptures and seek to embrace God's plan for the Church, we acknowledge God's authority over our lives individually and collectively in the Body of Christ because He is our Savior who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to give us eternal hope in Himself alone.