

Authority | Matthew 28:16-18 | May 25, 2017

All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been give to me. (Mt 28:18)

Authority = exousia

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Might, Authority, Throne: The word **dynamis** suggests the inherent capacity of someone or something to carry something out, whether it be physical, spiritual, military or political... **exousia**, on the other hand, is used only with reference to people. It indicates the power to act which given as of right to anyone by virtue of the position he holds. 601

exousia

Classical Literature – **exousia** (derived from **exesti**, *it is possible, permitted, allowed*) denotes unrestricted possibility or freedom of action; and then power, authority, right of action. From the noun comes **exousiazo**, to exercise one's rights, have full power of authority. 606

In the *LXX* **exousia** occurs much less commonly than **dynamis** [power/dynamite] (50 as against 400 times)... The book of Daniel is important as background material for the NT use of the word, where **exousia**, both in the *LXX* and in the translation of Theodotion [who in AD 150 translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek], is used as the Greek equivalent for Aramaic **sultana**, dominion, power, with reference even to the whole world. The authority of the human world-rulers originates from the supernatural realm; it is delegated by God, the Lord of history. He whose rule is eternal (Dan 4:31); installs and removes kings (2:21), and can take their dominion away from them all (7:12). The unsatisfactory and provisional nature of human government is grounded, in Dan 7, in the origin of the world-powers in the dominion of Chaos, opposed to God, and in their denial of their divine commission. Therefore, at the end of the times, and when human rule has reached its lowest point, the "Son of Man" (i.e. man) is enthroned to symbolize the rule of God's mercies, and for that very reason, of true humanity. He is invested with might, glory and sovereign authority to rule all nations. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which never passes away (7:14). The "Son of Man", according to Dan 7:27, means "the people of the saints of the Most High", the true Israel of the last days. They shall receive kingly power, and all sovereignties must obey them. 607

In the *NT* **exousia** appears 108 times [**dynamis** 118 times]... It is characteristic for the *NT* that **exousia** and **dynamis** are both related to the work of Christ, the consequent new ordering of cosmic power-structures and the empowering of believers. Both words are brought together in Lk 9:1-2 [*And he, Christ, called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.*] **exousia** is not attributed to the gift of the Spirit; whereas Jesus' **dynamis** has its foundation in his being anointed, his **exousia** is founded on his being sent. **Exousia** is that power, authority and freedom of action which belongs: (1) to

God himself; (2) to a commission in the last days; and (3) to a Christian in his eschatological existence. 608-609

God's exousia. God's eschatological authority is linked with his role as disposer of world history, and as judge of the world. By his own authority, he has fixed the dates and times of the end, and has the termination of history in his control (Acts 1:7). He has the power to consign men to eternal ruin (Lk 12:5). Existential consciousness of the absolute freedom of God finds its expression in his predestination: Paul compares God with a potter, who can do what he likes with the clay (Rom 9:21; cf. Isa 29:16; 45:9; Jer 18:6). 609

The exousia of Jesus. The work of the earthly Jesus announces that the devil and the demons have been deprived of their power: the One who is sent by God has the authority to destroy the works of the devil and to snatch men from his rule. Exorcism is therefore attributed to the authority of Jesus (Lk 4:36), which he can also pass on to the disciples he sends out (Matt 10:1 parallels Mk 3:15; Lk 9:1; Mk 6:7; Lk 10:19). Jesus acted with God's authority when he forgave a man his sins and confirmed the power of his word by a healing miracle (Matt 9:2-8 par. Mk 2:3-12, Lk 5:18-26; cf. Ps 103:3)... In John's Gospel Jesus' plenitentiary authority is based on the fact that he is the Son and that he is sent (Jn 17:2); he has also been given the authority of the judge at the end of time (Jn 3:16; 14:6). But in the Johannine writings, as the Synoptics, Jesus seeks to save men rather than judge them. His power is not forcible domination, but absolute freedom to be a servant to the world. He has the *exousia* to give his life and to take it again (Jn 10:18). Jesus' sacrifice opens the way for believers to the Father (Jn 3:16; 14:6). Those who receive him and believe in his name are given *exousia* to become children of God (Jn 1:12). 610

This representation of Jesus' authority in the Fourth Gospel anticipates the resurrection. For with his exaltation, which followed on from Easter, Jesus received from God all power in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18). This fulfilled Daniel's vision of the enthronement and granting of power to the Son of Man (cf. Dan 7:14). But now in place of the collective "saints of the Most High", stands Christ. Further, God's power is not realized by violently subjugating the nations, but by the spread of the gospel, winning the world to faith in Christ. Hence it is the church, not the sovereign rule of Israel, which outwardly expresses the reign of the messiah on earth (Acts 1:6-8). For the cross and the exaltation of Christ signify the disarming of the evil one, the judgment and the turning-point of the ages. This must be preached as Good News to all the world. The exalted Lord therefore sends out his messengers and empowers them for their service in the gospel (Matt 28:18-20). Analogous with Jesus' earthly ministry, and in accord with the contents of the Easter message, the apostles of Christ received power to confer the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:19; 19:6; but cf 2:38; 10:44-48), and to build up rather than to destroy (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10). 610-611

The exousia of believers. The authority of a Christian believer is founded on the rule of Christ and on the disarming of all powers. It implies both freedom and service. As Luther put it in *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520): "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all"... The believer has full freedom of action, because the law, as a prohibitive barrier, has been broken down through Christ's redeeming and saving act, and because he

has received the gift of the Spirit of freedom. He has the freedom and the power to dispose everything as he will, because, now that Christ has been exalted, nothing is any longer under the rule of the powers. In practice, however, this theoretically unrestricted freedom is governed by consideration of what is helpful to other individual Christians and the congregation as a whole, in view of the fact that the complete redemption is still to come (I Cor 6:12; 10:13). 611

N.T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (Harper One 2005).

All authority is from God, declares Paul in relation to governments (Ro 13:1); Jesus says something very similar in John 19:11 [*Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above."*]. In Matt 28:18, the risen Jesus makes the still more striking claim that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him, a statement echoed elsewhere—for instance, in Phil 2:9-11. A quick glance through many other texts in both the Old Testament (e.g., Is 40-55) and the New (e.g., Rev 4 and 5) would confirm this kind of picture. When John declares that “in the beginning was the word,” he does not reach a climax with “and the word was written down” but “and the word became flesh.” The letter to the Hebrews speaks glowingly of God speaking through scripture in time past, but insists that now, at last, God has spoken through his own son (Hb 1:1-2). 21-22

Authority, particularly when we locate it within the notion of God’s Kingdom, is the sovereign rule of God sweeping through creation to judge and to heal. It is the powerful love of God in Jesus Christ, putting sin to death and launching new creation. It is the fresh, bracing and energizing wind of the Spirit. 31

The role of the Bible within the church and the individual Christian life indicates three things which are of central importance as we proceed. To begin with, it reminds us that the God Christians worship is characterized not least as a God who *speaks*, who communicates with his human creatures in words... It means that the idea of reading a book to hear and know God is not far-fetched, but cognate with the nature of God himself. 31

Second, it is central to early Christian instruction that we be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Ro 12:1-2). In other words, it is important that God’s transforming grace is given to us not least through enabling us to *think* in new ways. Again, this means that the idea of reading a book in order to have one’s life reordered by the wisdom of God is not counter-intuitive, but is cognate with the nature of Christian holiness itself. 32

Third, it reminds us that the God we worship is the God whose world-conquering power, seen in action in the resurrection of Jesus, is on offer to all those who ask for it in order thereby to work for the gospel in the world (Eph 1:15-23). The idea of reading a book in order to be energized for the task of mission is not a distraction, but flows directly from the fact that we humans are made in God’s image, and that, as we hear his word and obey his call, we are able to live out our calling to reflect the creator into his world. 32