

## Authority Issues

Driving around in the area between Blue Ball and Honey brook one day last week, I couldn't seem to get a strong signal for a sports talk radio station (The NFL labor talks and all the chatter leading up to *March Madness* have put me into a listening rut.) In retrospect, it was probably not the *bona fide* crisis I imagined. Still, I hit the scan button, only to double-hit it again so as to keep moving through the stations. I knew what I was looking for, and patience isn't my virtue in such matters of urgency. Nevertheless, after I had abused that scan button through the channel selection rotation at least three times, I settled on the lone AM option that had a strong signal.

I was glad I did. It was a thoughtful dialogue between a host and a guest on a Christian station. It was centered in a thorough treatment of a miracle of Christ, and the application they were making seemed quite appropriate.

The miracle was the healing of the beloved servant of a particular centurion, a commander of 100 Roman soldiers. This centurion had been quite generous with the Jews in Capernaum, even to the point of providing a synagogue for them. He sent some of his men to find Jesus and to ask Him to heal the servant. Jesus started to go with them, but as he was nearing the house, another delegation came forth from the centurion, recognizing that Jesus did not need to enter the centurion's home. The Roman knew that this would just create another hassle for Jesus from the Pharisees, who would never ehhh-ver enter a Gentile's house. This second delegation delivered the following message to Jesus:

... "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. <sup>7</sup>That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup>For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

<sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." <sup>10</sup>Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. – Luke 7:6-10

What was it about this centurion's faith that amazed Jesus? What set it apart from most of the faith Jesus encountered in Israel? What is an application from which we might benefit? It may boil down to this: One essential element of true faith is its humble acquiescence to divine authority. Much of the faith in Jesus presented to Jesus in His day was tainted by the people's own messianic agendas; *i.e.*, what they expected that Jesus ought to do. Today, many "faith experiences" so-called, generate more spiritual pride than they ever do the obedience that recognizes His authority over all of life.

The two fellows in radio dialogue began to discuss our modern hang-ups with authority. The thoughtful exchange touched on the devastating decade of the sixties which challenged the very idea of respecting authority. For twenty minutes or so, I had made it without any updates as to whether or not I would have football next fall. Then, my appreciation for what I was listening to took a bit of a hit when the host said something I thought was a little snippy and not very well thought-through.

"If Martin Luther had spent a Lenten season meditating on this passage, maybe we would not have all these denominations today." (The idea being, I suppose, that Luther should have simply bent to the will of the mother church without protest.)

That was the first I realized that I has been listening to Catholic radio. I do not retract any of the good impressions I received from the discussion. I remain impressed with the thoughts expressed about our modern authority issues and the devastating decade of the sixties. But, since Martin Luther is dead and cannot defend himself, I will. Luther had no vision for denominationalism. He wanted to reform the church in areas where he was certain the mother church had deviated from the authority of Holy Scripture. According to Luther, it was the authority of scripture to which his own conscience was bound. Whenever the church sets itself on an equal authoritative par with the Bible rather than under it, the authority of the Bible will ultimately be eroded.

So, I still give credit where credit is due but I also must offer clarification where that is warranted. Apparently, the human hang-up with authority predates the sixties. It also predates the conflict between Romanism and Protestantism. It goes all the way back to the era of a talking snake, who against the backdrop of a forbidden tree said the first woman:

... <sup>4</sup>"You will not surely die" ... <sup>5</sup>"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ..." - Genesis 3:4, 5

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