



Authority Acknowledged

JESUS'S WORDS HAVE AUTHORITY.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 7:15-29 Memory Verse: Matthew 7:24

Sometime along the way, authority became a four-letter word. Some historians point to the rebellious and riotous 1960s. Still others point to postmodern influences and the belief that everyone defines right and wrong for themselves. Whatever the cause, many people have a negative view of authority in any form.

People in Jesus's day lived in an atmosphere of totalitarian authority. Politically, Rome and its governors dominated regions like Israel. Spiritually, Jewish religious leaders exerted their own coercive authority. The common folks knew both were inherently false.

But Jesus's audiences heard something different. He spoke with genuine authority, unlike the Jewish teachers. In Jesus, the people found an authentic voice, a voice of true authority they could accept and follow.

As you prepare to teach this final session from the Sermon on the Mount, evaluate your own attitude toward authority—including God's authority over your life. Ask Him to help you surrender to Him and to give you the wisdom you need to guide the adults in your Bible study to acknowledge His authority in their lives.



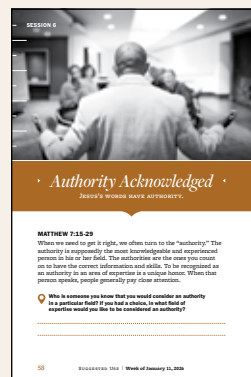
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When we need to get it right, we often turn to the “authority.” The authority is supposedly the most knowledgeable and experienced person in his or her field. The authorities are the ones you count on to have the correct information and skills. To be recognized as an authority in an area of expertise is a unique honor. When that person speaks, people generally pay close attention. (PSG, p. 58)

Who is someone you know that you would consider an authority in a particular field?
If you had a choice, in what field of expertise would you like to be considered an authority?



Understand the Context (Matthew 7:1-29)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus progressed through topics with fluid grace. Spiritual truth flowed from His lips to eager ears ready for genuine guidance. In this final section of His message, Jesus warned the people to avoid judging one another. Instead, they should focus their attention and energy on their own culpability before God. He was not saying believers should abandon loving discernment, but they should avoid self-righteous criticism and condemnation of others. Only as people deal with their own personal sin can they nurture the humility and grace needed to correct others as Jesus did.

Jesus challenged hearers to apply biblical principles to their relationship with God and with one another. For example, we relate to God as a Father who knows and cares about our needs. Therefore, we can continually ask, seek, and knock with confidence that He hears our prayers. Because the Father loves us, He provides for us according to what is best for us.

Because we enjoy this interactive relationship with God, we should treat others in the same way. This “Golden Rule” is based not on human principles, but on the application of reciprocal love. It summarizes the intention of all the Mosaic law and the prophetic writings—in other words, the entirety of Scripture.

It’s easy to follow the wide road of human inclination rather than the narrow road of godly obedience. It’s also easy to find false prophets

who tickle our ears by advocating false teaching. This was a dangerous situation for Jesus’s listeners and remains so for us today.

Some people call Jesus “Lord,” yet they do not really know Him. As a result, true believers should beware. Without being judgmental, we are instructed to take note of the fruit produced by each person and to choose wisely the direction we follow.

Taking the various teachings of His sermon as a whole, Jesus used an analogy to illustrate how we should respond. Using familiar word pictures, He portrayed two houses with very different foundations. One house was built on solid rock, while the other stood on shifting sand. One endured the storms that beat against it; the other crashed as its foundation was swept away by the tempest. Similarly, wise believers not only hear Jesus’s teachings, but they incorporate each precept into their lives. A sound relationship with Christ informs their understanding of these principles and their application. Jesus alone is the true Rock who offers a sound foundation for life (1 Pet. 2:1-7).

Read Matthew 7:15-29 in your Bible. Make a list of words that describe the lifestyle of followers of Christ and another list of words that describe the way of the self-righteous religious leaders. (PSG, p. 59)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Sermon on the Mount). Gather pens or highlighters.

INTRODUCE:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 58 of the PSG.

ASK:

Who is someone you know that you would consider an authority in a particular field? If you had a choice, in what field of expertise would you like to be considered an authority? (PSG, p. 58)

STATE:

When Jesus taught, people were amazed because He had an authority they had never experienced. His words carried power, and the traditions and teachings of the religious leaders simply could not hold a candle to the kingdom principles He explained. That authority made Jesus's instructions important in the first century, but they are just as important today. We still need to hear Him and acknowledge His authority in our lives by obeying Him.

REVIEW:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Sermon on the Mount) and share that this is the third and final session drawn from the Sermon on the Mount. Invite adults to scan the handout and to share things they have learned from the previous sessions on this sermon.

TRANSITION:

This session highlights contrasting lifestyles. And it challenges us to make a choice. We can experience the joy of following God's way or face the consequences of going our own way.



Group Activity Option

Music

Prior to the session, make copies of the lyrics to “Authority” by Elevation Worship. During the session, play the song while the group follows along. Ask: **How would you describe the authority of Jesus?** Point out that Christians understand that Christ is the ultimate authority over our lives, but He also has authority over all creation. Guide the group to underline these words: *voice*, *word*, and *true*. Note that these are powerful “authority” words. Guide adults to find and circle the other words or phrases that point to Christ’s divine authority. (Examples: *prevail*, *strongholds moved*, *spirits silenced*, and *cower*) Encourage adults to look for ways Jesus’s words carried authority as they study this session’s verses.

Fruit (Matt. 7:15-20)

15 “Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. **16** You’ll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? **17** In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. **18** A good tree can’t produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19** Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** So you’ll recognize them by their fruit.”

(v. 15) Jesus understood human vulnerability. Even His followers were not exempt from the subtle seduction of false teachers. He warned them to **be on your guard**. This phrase translates a single command to be on alert continually. The danger of **false prophets** should not be underestimated. Heretics not only spoke falsehoods, but they also did it in God’s name. Their purpose was to deceive unsuspecting individuals.

One might not easily identify false prophets because they tend to look and sound good. They seem to be part of the Lord’s flock, but they are wearing **sheep’s clothing**. Outwardly, they seem genuine, but Jesus described them as **ravaging wolves**. These false teachers pursued their victims viciously, hunting susceptible prey.

(vv. 16-17) We recognize false prophets **by their fruit**. Their words and deeds must be consistent with God’s Word. Old Testament prophets had a simple test: Did what they say come true? (Deut. 18:21-22). Jesus’s caution applied not only to those who falsely claimed to prophesy what was to come, but also to those who taught false doctrine.

Like most of His illustrations, Jesus used things familiar to His audience to make a point. Here, He used a rhetorical question that highlights an evident truth: **Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles?** The obvious response was “certainly not.”

In the same way connects the illustration with its logical conclusion. **Every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit**. In Greek, the terms describing bad trees and bad fruit are slightly different. The trees are damaged by an external defect, like a disease. But the bad fruit is internally rotten, making it worthless. In its moral sense, “bad” implies harm, like spoiled fruit that makes a body sick.

Keep in mind the general nature of metaphors. Some fruit of good trees may have worms or other problems, but the basic principle remains

true. Godly people may sin on occasion, but their lifestyles will not be characterized by sin. In contrast, lost people may do good deeds on occasion, but the core of their lives is corrupt and godless.

Applied to false prophets, some genuinely godly teachers may be incorrect on occasion, but they do not intentionally deceive others. Conversely, phony prophets may say some things that appear true, but their motivation is rotten.

(vv. 18-19) Parallelism is a literary technique used for emphasis. It repeats a statement using slightly different terminology. Jesus reiterated the illustration of trees. In general, a **good tree** doesn’t yield **bad fruit**, and a **bad tree** doesn’t yield **good fruit**. We see a consistency between people and their lifestyles, as well as between spiritual leaders and their teachings.

A wise farmer understands the danger that diseased trees pose to the rest of the grove. If a tree can’t **produce good fruit**, he will **cut it down**. In Jesus’s day, such trees were **thrown into the fire** lest they infect healthy trees.

It’s important to understand that Jesus was not advocating works-based salvation in verse 19. Salvation is always a gift of God’s grace, and believers’ good works reveal His presence in their lives (Eph. 2:8-10). Instead, Jesus emphasized that no matter how good unbelievers seem on the outside, they will face judgment in the end.

(v. 20) Having admonished the disciples to beware of false prophets, Jesus again assured them that false teachers could be identified **by their fruit**. Spiritual discernment differs from self-righteous judgment and criticism. Believers have a responsibility to evaluate what people say and do to make sure it lines up with Scripture.

Similarly, believers’ lives should exhibit spiritual fruit. When others look at us, they should have no question about the health of our “tree” or the “fruit” it produces.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers' lives should exhibit spiritual fruit.

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 1–13*). Remind adults that this session comes from the Sermon on the Mount, the first major discourse in Matthew's Gospel.

READ: **Read Matthew 7:15-20** aloud, encouraging adults to note the contrasts described in the passage.

SHARE: Allow volunteers to share the contrasts they noted in the verses. Highlight the imagery of a wolf in sheep's clothing in verse 15. Note the danger in following teachers who look good, but who view their followers as "consumables."

ASK: **What false teachings are popular in our culture?**

RECAP: To help explain the illustration of fruit used by Jesus in the passage, share this content from pages 60-61 of the PSG:

Though Jesus said we are not to judge (v. 1), He called His followers to be "fruit inspectors." He illustrated this in terms of gathering "grapes . . . from thornbushes" and "figs from thistles." What a bush is by nature determines the type of fruit it bears. What a person is in the heart determines the type of observable behaviors and attitudes they exhibit. . . . The condition of the heart is evidenced by the lifestyle produced.

ASK: **How can you tell the difference between judging someone (v. 1) and discerning fruit (v. 20)?** (PSG, p. 61)

STATE: *It's vital for Christ followers to recognize heresy. False teachers will be judged, along with anyone who follows them. While we need to be humble and loving, we can't afford to let our guard down when it comes to false teachers and false doctrine.*

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Potted Plant

Prior to the session, secure a potted plant. During the session, encourage adults to share some ideas for keeping the plant healthy, as well as signs that it might be dying. Highlight Jesus's illustration of the good trees and bad trees. Affirm that we can nurture healthy spiritual lives, but we also need to be on the lookout for false teachers that spread deception and spiritual disease.

Obedience (Matt. 7:21-23)

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ **23** Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!’”

(v. 21) After warning against false prophets, Jesus addressed the issue of false believers. Sadly, many people think they are saved because they are church members or live “good” lives. But Jesus noted that some who address Him as **Lord** will not **enter the kingdom of heaven**. This kingdom includes more than heaven in eternity. It also includes the complete rule and reign of God in our lives now.

Jesus distinguished between those who claim Him as Lord and those who actually submit to His reign. True salvation involves repentance, faith, and receiving Christ as Savior and Lord (John 1:11-12; Acts 3:19; 16:31). Genuine conversion involves obeying **the will** of the **Father**. One cannot live in rebellion against the Lord and expect a place in His eternal kingdom.

(v. 22) Most scholars believe **that day** refers to the day of the Lord when Jesus returns in power and judgment (see Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 5:2-3). This will be a time of reward for believers (2 Tim. 4:8), but terror for the lost.

Jesus described a scene in which **many** will be shocked to find themselves outside the kingdom. Earlier, Jesus urged people to enter the narrow gate of salvation because choosing the wider path leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14).

As they stand before Christ, multitudes will cry **Lord, Lord** as they plead to enter His kingdom. Without offering an exhaustive list, Jesus focused on three pleas that will be made by people who pretend to follow Him.

Some will claim to **prophesy** in Jesus’s **name**. Old Testament prophecy usually involved foretelling future events under God’s inspiration, yet false prophets spoke lies to lure God’s people away from Him (Deut. 13:1-3). Often, New Testament prophecy refers to religious teaching or preaching. Jesus addressed people who illegitimately spoke for Him.

Others claimed to **drive out demons** and work **miracles**. Doing something in Jesus’s name means claiming His authority and on His behalf.

In all three instances, people misused His name for their own purposes. Like the fake exorcists in Acts who tried to cast out demons using Jesus’s name, these people will suffer for dishonoring the Name above all names (Acts 19:13-16).

(v. 23) Jesus will **announce** unleash His judgment on these false followers. They did not have the right to use Jesus’s name because He **never knew** them. Of course, Jesus knows *about* them, since He possesses divine omniscience. But they will have no personal relationship to support their claims. They will be missing a genuine spiritual transformation that moves them from darkness to light. Jesus’s denial of these individuals means they will lack a saving relationship with Him. As a result, they would suffer the consequences.

Jesus also called them **lawbreakers**. The Greek wording emphasizes one who actively and willfully rejects God’s commands. Regardless of their protests, these imposters were determined to violate His laws. As a result, Jesus will order them to **depart** from His presence. Separation from Christ’s presence is the essence of hell. Eternal damnation involves suffering eternal torment removed from Jesus.

Believers are known by their desire to obey God’s Word. They not only make a statement of belief, but they also demonstrate genuine faith by joyfully doing God’s will.

Key Doctrine

The Scriptures

All Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. (See Psalm 119:89; 2 Timothy 3:15-17.)



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers are known by their desire to obey God's Word.

Lead the group to read Matthew 7:21-23 silently and to record the emotions they experience in the margin of the PSG.

DISCUSS:

Allow a few volunteers to share what they wrote in their Personal Study Guides and why this passage raised those emotions in their hearts and minds.

ASK:

What are some situations when wearing a costume or a mask might be fun or useful? Point out that sometimes a mask is appropriate for our setting, but Jesus was calling out individuals who were wearing spiritual masks—either because they were deceived or because they wanted to deceive others.

RECAP:

To explain Jesus's words to the false followers, summarize this content from page 62 of the PSG:

“Jesus spoke of people who engage in religious activities but are not true followers of Christ. Some are teachers and preachers, while others perform miracles including exorcisms. But religious activity can be a mask that hides a heart that is far from God. . . . These false believers will offer all types of pleas about their spirituality and good works in Jesus's name. However, they will be exposed for the counterfeits they are. Jesus emphasized that religious activities are not always synonymous with obedience. The religious activities described here were outward, showy, charismatic activities. But they were all empty substitutes for obedience in daily living.”

ASK:

What does obedience to God's Word reveal about one's relationship with God? (PSG, p. 63)

PRAY:

Emphasize that looking like a Christian—and even acting like one—is not enough. Direct attention to the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover of the PSG. Take a moment to share what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ. Encourage adults to spend a moment in silent prayer, talking with God about where they stand with Him. Lead the group in the prayer at the end of the Plan of Salvation. Let adults know that you are available to speak with anyone who prayed that prayer or would like to learn more about accepting Jesus's offer of salvation.

Wisdom (Matt. 7:24-29)

24 “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **25** The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn’t collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. **26** But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn’t act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. **27** The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash.” **28** When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, **29** because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.

(vv. 24-25) Concluding His sermon, Jesus incorporated all He had taught in a final illustrative warning. In this case, **therefore** looks back not only to the immediate statements about false prophets but also to His entire message.

Jesus contrasted two kinds of people within the larger group of **everyone who hears these words of mine**. These groups differ in how they respond to what He said. The person who **acts on them** obeys His teaching. The verb tense describes someone who doesn’t just heed Christ’s words once in a while, but constantly.

This person resembles **a wise man** who builds his residence on a foundation of **rock**. Notice the progression: He hears, then he acts. His obedient action is wise—ensuring a secure footing for his life.

But challenging circumstances afflict everyone. In Jesus’s word picture, driving **rain**, rising **rivers**, and pounding **winds** pummeled the structure. The house built on the rock did not escape a rough environment, yet **it didn’t collapse**.

This man’s house survived because it was built **on the rock**. The New Testament identifies Jesus as our Rock (1 Pet. 2:4-8). With Christ as the basis for our lives, we can live securely, regardless of circumstances.

(vv. 26-27) Sadly, others are like **a foolish man**. Jesus said this person also **hears these words of mine**, but he **doesn’t act on them**. Both builders have the advantage of Jesus’s words, but they respond very differently and experience very different results.

This foolish man **built his house on the sand**. By its nature, sand provides little stability for a structure. You can build a home on the beach because you like an oceanfront view, but you must drive the supports deep enough to reach bedrock.

Unfortunately, many people bypass the rock of Christ and build their lives on the sand of personal desires.

As with the first house, the **rain, rivers**, and **winds** battered the building. The circumstances are the same in both settings, but the result for the second house was disastrous. **It collapsed with a great crash**. When we ignore Christ, we are like this unstable house built on sand. Without Him, we are bound to collapse.

(vv. 28-29) Jesus did not specifically make the above application, but the point was clear to the **crowds** who heard Him. Scholars note that as Jesus spoke, His disciples were joined by many others who had followed Him. And, when He was done, He simply **finished** the message.

But His listeners felt the impact of His words. They were **astonished at his teaching**. The verb tense indicates an ongoing response that resonated with them long after the sermon ended. Their reaction revealed the overwhelmingly powerful effect of Jesus and His words.

The term **because** establishes the reason for the people’s response. While His words were powerful, Jesus Himself was the Source of the power. The crowds were accustomed to the secondhand reflections of **their scribes** whose instruction was based primarily on rabbinical traditions. They lacked the personal **authority** of Christ. Jesus’s teaching wasn’t just repeating precepts. It carried the potency of His person and His presence as God the Son.

Believers can stand firm on God’s Word. Placing our faith in Jesus as God the Son, we can be sure that we not only have solid principles for life, but that we also have direct access to the Person who empowers those truths.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can stand firm on God's Word.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 7:24-29 aloud as the group underlines adjectives from the verses that stand out to them.

DISCUSS: Allow volunteers to share what words they underlined and why. Note that while verses 21-23 touched people's emotions, Jesus's story about the builders appeals to people's minds. Point out that this is a hallmark of a master teacher.

ASK: **What is the primary difference between the two builders?**

RECAP: Share this content from page 63 of the PSG to help adults reflect on how their responses apply to their lives:

Jesus called His followers to build their lives on the strong foundation of His teaching. He illustrated this with a parable about houses, foundations, and storms. Building a life is like building a house. The foundation of any house is essential. In this parable, a choice was made of building the foundation on solid rock or shifting sand.

EXPLAIN: Point out that two things were the same: Both groups heard Jesus's words and both groups experienced storms. Affirm that Jesus has given us His teachings and "storms" are going to shake our lives. Emphasize that the foundations—accepting or rejecting Jesus and His words—was what made the difference.

DISCUSS: Lead a brief discussion on how the crowd reacted and why. Affirm that Jesus demands a response from each person.

ASK: **Who in your circle of friends needs to hear and act on the message of the gospel?** (PSG, p. 65)

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Wise people build their lives on the foundation of Jesus. Look up the passages in which the psalmist referred to God as his "rock": Psalm 18:2; 62:2,6. List other images in these verses used by the psalmist to describe what it meant to have God as his rock (for example, "fortress"). Prophets also described God as a rock. Read 1 Samuel 2:2 and Isaiah 26:4; 28:16. Note qualities such as "everlasting" and "unshakable." Now read the following New Testament passages: 1 Corinthians 3:11; 10:4; and 1 Peter 2:4-8. **How do these verses add to your understanding of Jesus as your foundation?**

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 66 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *Believers' lives should exhibit spiritual fruit.*
- *Believers are known by their desire to obey God's Word.*
- *Believers can stand firm on God's Word.*

REFLECT:

Direct adults to read through the application points from the session again and to give themselves a ranking for each one on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being "lacking" and 5 being "perfect"). After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share which point got their highest ranking and why. Emphasize that no one is perfect, but God wants us to come to Him and allow Him to make us more like Him in each of these areas.

DISCUSS:

Encourage adults to read and discuss the first set of questions on page 66 of the PSG. As a group, make a list of ways they can encourage one another and hold one another accountable for bearing good fruit and building on a strong foundation. (Possible answers: phone calls, meet weekly in pairs, encouraging text messages, and so forth) Suggest they follow through on identifying a partner and identify one way to live out this application step.

PRAY:

Once the adults have paired off, encourage them to pray together. Close the session in prayer, asking God to teach each person how to live their faith in a genuine way every day for their good and God's glory.

AFTER THE SESSION

During the week, text or email the group the second set of questions from page 66 of the PSG. Feel free to share your greatest area of struggle and ask adults to pray for you in that area. Encourage the other adults to share and to pray for one another. Remind them to connect with their prayer partner during the week and to reach out to you if they have more questions about becoming a Christian.

LEADER BLOG



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