

## Pursuing God: The Authority to Obey

Ezra 5-6:12

**MPS** Christ-followers obey and serve God's mission by His authority to accomplish His purpose for His glory in the world.

**OBJ** Every Christian should live in humble submission to God's authority because of 4 blessings.

**INTRO** Today in "Pursuing God", we consider the Christian's authority to obey and serve God. When the work re-started in Ezra 5, there was a difference in the Israelite's obedience. They trusted in God's authority and not their own. **God's people accomplish God-sized tasks when we obey and serve His mission by His authority.**

**READ** Ezra 5:3-5

*Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. <sup>2</sup>Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.*

*<sup>3</sup>At the same time Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus: "Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?" <sup>4</sup>They also asked them this: "What are the names of the men who are building this building?" <sup>5</sup>But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it. **Ezra 5:1-5***

The Word of God awakens the people through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah so that they repent and return to their work. There was a unity among them to support and encourage one another in the work. When the local governors hear of the work restarting, they confront them and ask who gave them permission and who it was that was doing the work. They wanted names to turn in to the King. But verse five tells of another authority "overseeing" the project: "*But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews.*" **The leaders led the Jewish people to return to their work because they remembered under whose authority they lived.**

**Christ-followers obey and serve God's mission by His authority to accomplish His purpose for His glory in the world.**

**TRANS** Consider what transpires for the Israelites.

**Overview** Ezra 5:6 - 6:12

Ezra 5:6-10 records a letter that Governor Tattenai and his counterparts wrote to King Darius to report the work of the Israelites. They seek to arouse fear in Darius by making him aware of their work. Verses 11-16 record the Israelite answer. In their answer they give a simple appeal to why they are there and how it came about. Their response is simply a testimony of God's direction that reveals their authority, and of Cyrus' provision to resource the work. Governor Tattenai requests a response on how to proceed, surely hoping and thinking he will get permission to shut them down once again. But, and likely even unknown to him, his request causes Darius to discover another later decree by Cyrus.<sup>6:1-12</sup> King Darius searches and finds Cyrus' decree in records. He writes back to Tattenai and re-authorizes the work to continue. Commentator Derek Kidner notes, "From this point onward right to the end of Nehemiah there is conflict. Nothing that is attempted for God will now go unchallenged, and scarcely a tactic be unexplored by the opposition."<sup>1</sup> He is right; any place or life without the enemy's opposition is absent of God's mission. Where mission is not served there is no authority present and no obedience rendered. **The enemy guarantees that opposition to mission is inevitable. And though efforts to thwart remain unceasing, power to overcome is impotent against God's authority.**

<sup>1</sup>Derek Kidner. *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 12. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979) 53.



**The first issue of obedience to God and serving His mission is always one of authority;** “Who sent you?” and “What are you doing?” Christians are called to walk in obedience to God’s commands by faith because of His authority. Jesus modeled a life under the Father’s authority in His ministry on earth by submitting to only speak the words the Father gave Him to speak<sup>John14:10</sup> and complete the work He gave Him to do.<sup>John17:2-4</sup> Jesus says that Holy Spirit only speaks by His authority.<sup>John16:13</sup> And Jesus’ last words to His disciples were “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore...*”<sup>Matt28:18-19a</sup> “Sent” is another word that denotes an authorized life: the Father sent the Son, the Son sent the Spirit, and Christ-followers live sent as Ambassadors of the gospel.<sup>2Cor5:20</sup> The way a Christ-follower lives indicates the authority we live under: a life “sent” in Jesus’ Name denotes God’s authority, which is required for obedience to His mission. **The life of obedience by faith to serve God’s mission is ordained by God’s authority. And the life ordained by God’s authority is one unhindered, though not unopposed, in accomplishing God’s will.**

One of the greatest **misconceptions about Christianity and confusions that many Christians hold** is to obey God in our strength; to give ourselves to what we can accomplish instead of what God commands or calls us to. We work from a sense of <sup>1</sup>what we think we ‘ought’ to do, <sup>2</sup>what we think we are ‘able’ to do, or <sup>3</sup>what we know will receive man’s ‘applause’ for doing. When we serve God in this way, we obey in our own strength, absent of faith, and allow our <sup>1</sup>ability or understanding to limit us, <sup>2</sup>fear to steer or control us or <sup>3</sup>opposition to stop us. But this is not how God designed our obedience or service to operate. **The life of a Christ-follower is ordained, authorized, by God: He commands what He has already accomplished in Jesus for righteousness and glory**<sup>John19:30</sup>, **determined** for us to do<sup>Eph2:10</sup>, and will thus **empower in us** by Holy Spirit<sup>Acts1:8</sup>. A Christ-follower lives under God’s authority to trust His power in us and accomplish His purpose for us by His work through us.

**OBJ** The answer the Israelites gave in Ezra 5 demonstrate **4 blessings of God’s authority** that anchor our lives to live in humble submission to Him.

**#1:** When we live under God’s authority, we live in **the blessing of a New IDENTITY 5:11a**

*“And this was their reply to us: ‘We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth,’”*

A right understanding of your identity as a Christian is *essential* to living under God’s authority. Until you rest in your identity in Christ, you will continue to work to earn God’s favor or people’s applause. No matter how well we do, we cannot obey God outside of his authority.

Too often we define obedience as complying to God’s rules. Rebellion is NOT first about outward actions, but inward rejection. So, **obedience is** not about outward compliance or conformity, but **‘inward orientation’ to living in the presence, peace, power and pleasures of God at all times.** **We are never more fully and completely identified with God than when we live with a heart full of God.**

Jesus demonstrates<sup>Matt4</sup> and teaches<sup>John14.10,11</sup> how His obedience was from the Father’s authority and how his identity determined his mission<sup>John14.31</sup>. He shows that our identity determines our mission<sup>John17.18;2Cor5:17-20</sup>. **When we live in our new identity in Christ, it sources our strength for obedience.** We will only live to serve God when first we trust Him as the source of our new identity in Christ. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”*<sup>2Cor5:17</sup> **The blessing of a new identity is this: before anything else, you must trust in the great work God has done for you to remake you in Jesus Christ.**

**APPL** LP Identity of a Christ-follower Worshiper – Servant – Disciple – Missioner forms the new identity that God has remade in us. Now these four aspects of our new life form the meaning, purpose, and direction for all of life.

**#2:** When we live under God’s authority, we live in **the blessing of a New PERSPECTIVE 5:11b**

*“...and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.”*

Nothing is more dangerous than for Christians to believe that what God is doing ‘here and now’ is in any way disconnected from what He has always been about. Great encouragement and strength lies in knowing that we join God in His redemptive work that He has always been about. And this new perspective reorients our whole life. Paul teaches how this happens.



*“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup>and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. <sup>16</sup>From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.”* **2 Corinthians 5:14-16**

The new creation God has made of us causes us to believe something new about Jesus Christ. And because we hold a new perspective of Jesus, we hold a new perspective of all things. We no longer live for the applause and accolades from, nor the reward of this world. We now live for the One who died for all. **When we live under God’s authority, we live with the blessing of a new perspective of who He is, what He is doing, and how He is using us to accomplish His purpose.**

**APPL** LP Theo Perspective We know God as Truth, Mystery and Story. Few things are as empowering as seeing your life in the greater story of God’s redemptive plan. Nothing is as encouraging as knowing God is using you to reach other people for His glory.

**#3:** When we live under God’s authority, we live in **the blessing of REDEMPTION. 5:12-15**

*But because our fathers had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylonia. <sup>13</sup>However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. “...and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site.”* **Ezra 5:12-13,15**

If Ezra’s record tells us anything, it reminds us that God does great things through His people because He is great. God was the one rebuilding His temple in Jerusalem. But by His will and purpose, the people He sent into exile He brought back to serve His mission. **Why did God do this?** God is a redeeming God. He sent Jesus as our propitiation for our sin debt. Once our sin debt was paid, He could forgive, cleanse, and reconcile us to Himself. And now reconciled, He could redeem us to serve His mission. **God redeems for the glory of His divine purpose in Jesus.**

The answer the Israelite leaders gave of God’s work shows their trust in God. Instead of being angry about the past or God’s discipline, they saw God’s redemption. When you live outside God’s authority, his work becomes a ‘root for anger’ instead of a ‘seed of redemption’. **How do you understand God’s work in your life? When you think of your past, the ‘hard lessons’, do you remain ‘angry at God’ or ‘trust him for understanding’?**

If mission were determined by our ability or capacity, God would be limited by his people. But God does not have a mission for his people. Rather, God has a people that He empowers for His mission. God’s people are for His mission. The mission is always greater than the people’s ability or capacity because it is God’s, and through that mission he matures his people. **What God wants to do thru you is bigger than ‘you’, both your ability and even your imagination. But when you live under His authority, He empowers you to serve His redemptive purpose by the blessing of your redemption.**

**#4:** When we live under God’s authority, we live in **the blessing of PERSEVERANCE. 5:16**

Living under God’s authority is the key to perseverance. When we remember all God has done and promised, we are strengthened to ‘stay the course’, to persevere in all God has called us to until the work is finished. God’s authority anchors our confidence that He completes what He starts, so we stop looking for an exit, and focus on a plan for advancement. We remember that God’s authority is always accompanied by His care: God watches over those who are His. Peter reminds us: *“Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”* **1 Peter 3.12**

**ILLUS** **Is there anywhere you are wanting to give up on God?** A video<sup>2</sup> of a bear cub wandering along a river when a mountain lion stalks up to it. Just as he prepares to attack the momma bear appears behind the cub. When the cub growls at the mountain lion it turns away, but not because of the growl.

<sup>2</sup>Bear mother saves cub from Mountain lion. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Geb3oCcB\\_iY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Geb3oCcB_iY)



Remember: God sees and hears. He knows and cares. He will act. You may wonder if you can trust him, if your obedience will be noticed or worth it. [When you trust God's authority and obey, your identity, perspective, redemption and perseverance will be a blessing of God's power in your life.](#)

[Christ-followers obey and serve God's mission by His authority to accomplish His purpose for His glory in the world.](#)

**CLOSE** Christian, you live by God's authority to obey and serve His mission. No matter what comes against you, nothing is greater than His authority. [Let anything that is stopping you 'Stop', and let God's authority empower you to pursue Him.](#)

