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# Authority

Still More Words of Life for the Church and for the World  
2016–17 LCMS Circuit Bible Studies

## **PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE**

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## FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

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It's likely that, at some point in your ministry, a parishioner will call your authority into question. "Who are you to say?" Equally likely is that you may fall into the temptation to appeal to your authority and exert your will upon a situation, "Because I'm the Pastor!" For both, there needs to be repentance and forgiveness. By returning to a godly understanding of the source and use of authority in both the Church and the Office of the Ministry, our people can believe that what we preach and declare is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord deals with us Himself. Godly authority is also a great comfort to pastors so that we can boldly proclaim God's Word — Law and Gospel — knowing that it is not our Word or forgiveness, but God's.

## SCRIPTURAL USAGE AND UNDERSTANDING

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Jesus was often challenged to demonstrate by what authority He was preaching, teaching and acting. Because He challenged the established authority of the Jewish religious leaders; He had to substantiate that His authority superseded their own. Read the following passages about authority to see how we should understand the authority given to pastors to serve.

### Jesus' authority questioned

› Read Mark 2:1–12

Jesus demonstrates His authority over sin by performing a miracle over the effects of sin. The scribes took offence when Jesus proclaimed forgiveness, because only God has authority to forgive sins. They also understood that God's authority to demonstrate forgiveness has been mediated to the priests and the sacrificial system of the temple. Jesus' ability to declare forgiveness apart from sacrifice or the religious establishment threatened their own authority over the people. God wasn't acting in accordance with what they had built their own authority on.

› Read Mark 11:27–33

The Chief Priests, Scribes and Elders were trying to validate Jesus' authority behind His words and actions. They sought to discredit Him and hold on to their corrupt authority over the people, which was founded on a righteousness of the Law, not on the promises of God. They were reluctant

### Questions:

1. What authority has Christ given you in your call as pastor?
2. What authorities are you called to submit to?
3. How can confusion over authority breed discord in a congregation?
4. How can acting with authority in our vocations be God-pleasing?

to answer Jesus because they couldn't find an answer that served their purposes. Faith, which submits to the authority of God and His Word, is willing to change (repent) in the face of God's authoritative correction.

### Jesus teaches from His own authority

› Read Matt. 7:24–29

When Jesus taught, He spoke of His own accord, unlike the Scribes who had to appeal to other teachers and traditions to substantiate their claims. Because Jesus is the Word of God incarnate and thus the highest authority of all, He speaks of His own accord, and doesn't need to appeal to any higher authority.

### The Father has given Jesus His authority

› Read John 5:25–29

Jesus has authority to judge. He will "come again to judge the living and the dead." For the faithful, Jesus declares a judgment of life and righteousness. For the unfaithful, the judgment is condemnation.

› Read John 12:49

› Read John 17:1–2

Jesus' authority comes from the Father. He does not claim an authority of His own, for His own glory, but He points

to the authority of our Heavenly Father. By the authority given to Jesus, He gives eternal life to all who believe in Him.

## To become children of God

- › Read John 1:9–13

Faith in Jesus brings blessings and “rights” we can claim in the kingdom of God. Those who receive Jesus by faith are given the “authority” to become children of God. Faith gives us an authoritative standing as children of God.

## Jesus hands on authority

- › Read Matt. 10:1
- › Read Matt. 28:16–20

Jesus establishes that “all authority in heaven and earth” had been given to Him (by His Father). He then hands on that authority so that His work would continue. Without Jesus giving them this authority, the apostles would have no call to make disciples through baptizing, preaching and teaching.

## Authority brings responsibility, not power

- › Read Matt. 20:25–28

Jesus prepares His disciples for the time when He will give them His own authority. They do not bear the authority for

their own benefit or glory but so that they might serve with that authority and do the works they are called to perform. The authority of the Office of the Ministry is not given so that God’s people could marvel at the man in the office, but at what God is accomplishing in their own lives through His Means of Grace.

## Confidence from authority

- › Read Luke 7:1–10

The centurion understood authority. He himself was under the authority of his superiors and as he was commanded to do, he was compelled to act. He also was one in authority over those under his command. As he told them to go, his charges would go; to come, they would come. He saw that Jesus had authority over illnesses and the things of this world and needed only to say the word and it would be done.

- › Read John 20:21–23
- › Read Luke 10:16

The people of God can hear their pastors speak “in the stead and by the command” of Jesus, and declare their sins forgiven, because their pastors speak what Christ has already declared. We have authority to speak as the One who sent us has spoken, no more and no less.

# CONFESSIONAL STUDY

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## [XIV. Concerning Church Government]

“Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call.”<sup>1</sup>

Being rightly called into service in a particular congregation is fundamental to the congregation members being able to look to their pastor as one having authority to preach, teach and administer the Sacraments to them. A call tells a congregation member who their pastor is and that he will have their spiritual best interests at heart when he must proclaim the Law — which their sinful nature will

not like — and when he will proclaim the Gospel — in which their new nature will rejoice.

## [XXVIII.] Concerning the Power of Bishops

“Many and various things have been written in former times concerning the power of bishops. Some have improperly mixed the power of bishops with the secular sword, and such careless mixture has caused many extensive wars, uprisings, and rebellions. For the bishops, under the guise of power given to them by Christ, have not only introduced new forms of worship and burdened consciences with reserved cases and with forcible use of the ban, but they also

<sup>1</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 46.

took it upon themselves to set up and depose emperors and kings according to their pleasure.”<sup>2</sup>

The bishops of which the Augsburg Confession speaks had reached beyond their pastoral calling and God-given authority to preach and teach, and claimed for themselves secular authority. Even more, they used secular means (arrests, fines, etc.) to enforce God’s Word. The churches of the Augsburg Confession were anxious to restore power to the proper authorities.

Today, pastors are tempted to exert our God-given authority into matters that do not pertain to our calling. We should be careful to speak from the Word of God to matters concerning the Word of God. Likewise, we cannot abandon to human whim matters about which God’s Word has clearly spoken.

1. What risk is there in exercising authority beyond one’s calling?
2. Could a trivial matter be so controverted among God’s people that it becomes a matter of spiritual care? What should a pastor do in accordance with his calling?

## TEACHING/PREACHING USAGE OF THE WORD

Timothy Mech begins his book, *Pastors and Elders*,<sup>5</sup> with an excellent discussion of distinguishing between “power” and “authority.” I commend not only this particular chapter, but the whole study to my brother pastors to use with their lay-leaders. It will strengthen your work together.

Mech quotes Rev. John W. Kleinig, to define “power” and “authority” as follows:

“Power is a limited ability or commodity. A person has power at the expense of someone else. I must disempower others in order to have it and keep it for myself. Those who lack authority use power. When people operate with power the reaction to them is political. If you operate with power than you have a

### [XXVIII.] Concerning the Power of Bishops

“Our people teach as follows. According to the gospel the power of the keys or of the bishops is a power and command of God to preach the gospel, to forgive or retain sin, and to administer and distribute the sacraments. For Christ sent out the apostles with this command (John 20[:21–23\*]): ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”<sup>3</sup>

The Augsburg Confession locates in God’s Word the authority to forgive and retain sins. In the Small Catechism regarding the Office of the Keys, we confess,

“*What do I believe according to these words?*”

I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.”<sup>4</sup>

Distinguishing between divine and earthly authority and callings grants to God’s people a faithful confidence that their sins are certainly forgiven.

constant battle with the other power people in your congregation. That leads you to manipulation by the great power-monger, Satan. Operate with power and you are operating on Satan’s terms.

Authority is an unlimited ability or commodity. You cannot exercise authority unless you are under authority. It is never taken. Authority is given to you by someone else. You can only receive it. I exercise authority by authorizing others to act. You don’t exercise authority by keeping it to yourself. The more I give my authority away the greater my authority is. Authority grows with the delegation of authority to others. When authorities speak people listen, even if they don’t agree.”<sup>6</sup>

2 Kolb-Wengert, 90

3 Kolb-Wengert, 92.

4 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 29.

5 Timothy Mech, *Pastors and Elders: Caring for the Church and One Another* (Concordia Publishing House, 2011).

6 Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 11, quoting *Wisdom for Pastors Seeking Joy in Their Ministry*, John W. Kleinig (Doxology, Inc. 2009), DVD.

Pastoral authority comes from Scripture. When we preach, teach and provide pastoral care from God's Word, we can do so with confidence that we have not spoken falsely. We can also take comfort in knowing that when we are rejected, they have not rejected our opinion, or even ourselves, but God. We also take comfort in knowing that when we sin in exercising our authority or take an approach of power, we too have God's sure word of forgiveness to restore us.

In the liturgy of Confession and Absolution, the pastor proclaims, "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The people respond with their "Amen."

Who can forgive sins but God alone?! The ones whom He has called and given authority to speak His word. In fact, He has commanded that we proclaim repentance and forgiveness in His name. It's not up to us whether to proclaim it or not! We speak as God has spoken; we can do no other. With a sure confidence born of faith, God's people declare "Amen", "Yes, yes, it shall be so." They have confidence because God has granted such authority to His Church.

## DISCUSSION

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1. Why is authority so important to the work of the Church?
2. What is often confused with authority and breeds strife?
3. How does clarity about authority bless a congregation? How does it bless you as the pastor?

## SUMMARY

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Authority is given and delegated from above. Christ has called His Church to proclaim forgiveness and has given us the authority to speak Law and Gospel in His name. Our sinful nature chafes at the thought of being limited by authority. But really, the authority which Christ has bestowed gives us confidence to preach and teach, and gives assurance to our hearers that God's Word and will are truly for them and their salvation.