

family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'” (John 8:31-36 NIV)

Keeping in mind the context of this article, these verses would indicate that a Christian’s definition of “free” is very different than those seeking “freedom” in a worldly sense. Those who are so verbal in their opposition to Christianity in our society today quite possibly have no understanding at all of what “freedom in Christ” might mean. That’s why it’s important for us to be able to discuss the difference between the two with them. So what are some questions or thoughts we might use in such discussion? Consider some of these:

- 1) What is the ultimate authority for your belief?
- 2) How or from whom does that authority get its power?
- 3) What are your feelings when you’re not allowed to express yourself in an open and free manner? Should I not have the same feelings when you deny me the opportunity to speak of my religion and my beliefs?
- 4) Does *your* freedom to act or do something cause another person to lose *their* freedom? Does your freedom to have pre-marital sex with whomever you wish take away another’s freedom to choose to remain pure until marriage?
- 5) Whose rights should be protected — mine to speak of God and Christ — or yours to not allow me to do so because it “offends” you?
- 6) As I ask for your tolerance in my belief that Christ is my Savior, what is something you would like to ask me to tolerate that does not infringe on the right I have to my belief?
- 7) If the authority *you* embrace places restrictions on *my* actions, isn’t it a matter of time until it might restrict actions of which you approve?
- 8) I embrace an authority that will not violate the decent rights of any human. If following that authority causes violation of a lesser authority, which authority should *I* follow? Which authority should *you* follow?

The bottom line of all of these thoughts is that God is the ultimate authority. There is none higher.

“Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all his enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (I Corinthians 15:24-26 NIV)

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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By What Authority

Several of our Diligence articles during the past few months have focused on various ways that Christians can be challenged today in their efforts to spread the Gospel. The authority we have to do that is from God Almighty but many in our society today don’t see it quite that way.

Although most of us are not subject to hostile attacks, we *do* live in an environment that is often hostile to our well being as Christians. Monitoring certain media outlets — particularly those who focus on Christian news — will quickly point out to listeners that there is an increasing “squeeze” being put on any person who publicly proclaims their belief in God — even more so toward those who proclaim an alliance with Christ. In previous articles, we have cited many examples of people who have lost jobs etc. because of their faith (see web site for Volume 3, Issues 8, 11 and 17).

Let’s consider for a moment the basis upon which the threats originate and why such threats are necessary for the Devil to keep souls bound to him. Through the decades of our history in the “Good Ole USA” we have enjoyed the warm feeling of being a part of a “Christian” or “Judeo Christian” nation. We have *In God We Trust* on our coins and *Under God* in our Pledge of Allegiance. Only until recent years, displays of the Ten Commandments went unprotested on numerous Government properties. Children openly sang God and Christ inclusive Christmas songs in their public school programs during the seasons recognized by just about everyone as Christmas and Thanksgiving.

Today however, and for the foreseeable future we can expect to see challenges at every turn when Christians acknowledge their faith overtly. The very fact that those who are anti-christians feel very uncomfortable at the very *mention* of the name of Jesus or God, tells of the daunting power that even the mention of His name has on those who openly deny and detest our Lord and Savior.

For those who are opposed to Christ it is essential for them to make *every effort* to denounce Him. So in our particular society, they plead to the only authority that can invoke punishment upon those who will not be silenced. In this country, that authority is our government — using its laws and its officials to the fullest extent possible, in every way possible. Unfortunately, in *many* instances, our government has began to bow to the dictates of those few. Incidentally, our

references to “government” includes every branch of government as well as public schools and agencies funded by our tax dollars. Any organization that receives tax dollars or *even* claims a tax-exempt status is subject to certain dictates of the governing officials. It is good that the government is of this world and its power is limited to this world. If that were not so, salvation would be legislated out of existence by the will of a few. But we have a higher authority, one that never ends.

Consider what many of the opponents of Christianity offer the people of our great nation in the name of freedom. They embrace homosexuality, abortion, free speech regardless of how distasteful, pedophilia, divorce for *any* cause whatsoever — no matter how minor, etc. Add to this list then all of those actions and behaviors that are a part of what anti-Christians want to be able to do without *any feelings of guilt* because of what they refer to as “the non-inclusive standard” of Christianity.

It’s quite a dichotomy that the very mention of the name of Jesus Christ seems to cause *pain* for those who do not even accept who He is. Apparently, His influence is still powerful even in the midst of their denial. Those who refuse to accept that Jesus Christ was *more* than just another person who walked on this earth, still feel guilt when they are faced with confronting the moral standards of Christianity. When that guilt reaches the point where they can no longer sufficiently *silence* the fact that there *are* certain standards that are not acceptable to the very Being whom they want to deny the existence of, they often become the market place for drugs and psychiatrists. They have no choice other than to make a futile attempt to alter their state of mind in an effort to allow them to *continue* to deny the existence of the *only* One who can give them the things for which they search. How good it would be if they would only accept the fact that they are searching under the wrong authority.

So, what are we saying here? Christians have *always* had to deal with those who are opposed to the standards of Christianity. The Apostles faced many situations similar those we have already mentioned. We can read of one instance in Acts

“Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,’ he said. ‘Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.’ Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than men!’” (Acts 5:27-29 NIV)

So to what did they refer to overcome the criticisms with which they were faced? It was the *authority* provided to them by God almighty.

Let’s look at another example.

“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Now what you

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worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are His offspring.’ Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:22-31 NIV)

So when Paul was among all of those statues of the various gods they worshiped, he used the statue they had made to the “unknown God” to declare to them the mighty power of the One God of whom they had no knowledge until that time. He explained to them that the God of whom he was speaking *commanded* all people to repent. His authority was the only authority worthy of their worship.

With each passing day, it seems there are fewer and fewer people interested in knowing about the One God of the Bible. We are surrounded by a society that also “worships” many gods — they just don’t have statues erected to most of them. It might be their own personal wants and desires or perhaps it’s the television set in their family room or even sports, money or any number of other idols to which they dedicate their time and/or money. They too — just like those to whom Paul was speaking — need to know about “*the unknown God.*” The God of the Bible, whose authority is over *all* of creation.

As we see our freedoms as Christians being encroached upon, it becomes more and more important that we take advantage of the opportunities we have to engage in a dialogue with those who are opposed to Christianity. Perhaps their opposition is a result of the fact that the One True God is unknown to them. It’s quite probable that they have accepted with eagerness the worldly lie that freedom exists under the authority of rulers of this earth and that Christianity is a non-accepting standard that will restrict what they define as “freedom.” The reality is that freedom exists in Christ and only in Him.

“To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?’ Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the

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