

# Reflections

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reading notes

JUNE 2005—*Moral Authority*

The ancients believed in something, for practical purposes, we will call *moral authority*. By moral authority, I mean a kind of authority that is not derived through appointment, but authority that is obtained by virtue of character. In other words, the individual is respected for their moral integrity without needing to appeal to academic degrees or appointments.

The idea of moral authority was discussed when rhetoric was taught by the ancients. (Rhetoric is the art of persuasion.) Aristotle, for example, wrote a book on rhetoric. In it he argues there are three key ingredients that constitute an effective persuasive speech. They are *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*.

*Logos* pertains to the reasonableness of any speech. Is the conclusion supported by the premises given? *Pathos* pertains to passion. The corresponding question here is, has the speaker sufficiently affected the emotions of the audience? *Ethos* pertains to the character of the speaker.

Of Ethos, Aristotle writes,

Persuasion is achieved by the speakers' personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: This is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true when exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided... his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses (Modern Library, p. 25).

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul appeals to his moral authority. He reminds the church that he did not come to them in word alone, or in vain, or of error, or motivated by uncleanness, or of guile. He did not come pleasing men. He did not use words of flattery, or a cloak of covetousness. He did not seek the glory of men nor preach the word of men. It is here that he writes,

...we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (2:6-8).

Who has that kind of authority over you? And over whom could you exercise such authority?

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