

Authority - TDNT

éxestin [it is proper, possible], *exousía* [right, power], *exousiázō* [to have the right or power], *katexousiázō* [to exercise authority]

éxestin. “It is free,” denoting a. an action that is possible because there is occasion for it or no obstacle to it, b. an action that is not prevented by a higher norm or court, and c. an action to which there is no psychological or ethical block. In the NT the term mostly refers to God’s law or will with its specific demands, especially the OT law. The NT itself does not ask what is permitted in this sense but what is pleasing to God (Eph. 5:10).

exousía.

A. Ordinary Greek Usage.

1. This word denotes first the “ability” to perform an action.
2. It then means the “right,” “authority,” “permission” conferred by a higher court: a. the possibility granted by government; b. the right in various social relationships, e.g., that of parents, masters, or owners.
3. Since the authority under 2. is illusory without real power, the term approximates at times to *dýnamis*, but with the distinction that *dýnamis* denotes external power but *exousía* has a more inward reference.
4. The term may then denote self-asserted freedom or caprice in antithesis to law (with *hýbris* as a parallel). Yet legal order is usually the context.
5. Derived meanings are “authoritative position,” “officebearers” (plural), “laudatory address,” “crowd,” and “pomp.”

B. The Jewish and NT Usage.

1. Jewish usage is parallel to the Greek; the senses are “permission,” “authority,” or “right.” Philo has the term for the absolute power of the king or people, or that of God as seen in his creative activity and his judgments.
2. The LXX uses the term for right, authority, etc. in the legal sense and also as it is given by God, e.g., in the law. In Daniel and Maccabees it may be the power of the king or of God. By using *exousía* for God’s power the LXX introduces a term that excellently expresses the concept of God’s unrestricted sovereignty, of the God whose very word is power (cf. Dan. 4:14).
3. Formally, NT usage is closest to that of the LXX. *exousía* is God’s power, the power given to Jesus, or the power given by Jesus to his disciples. It is also the power of government (cf. Lk. 19:17; Acts 9:14: the Sanhedrin; Lk. 20:20: Pilate), the power of self-determination (Acts 5:4), the power of kings (Rev. 17:12), and “the powers that be” (plural) (Lk. 12:11; Rom. 13:1). It may also denote a sphere of dominion, e.g., the state (Lk. 23:7), the domain of spirits (Eph. 2:2), or the spiritual powers (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16; 1 Pet. 3:22).
4. The rabbinic parallel *r’šût* contributes to the range of meaning that *exousía* displays in the NT, since it embraces such meanings as power of disposal, possession, commission, right, freedom, and government (singular), as well as the monarchical power of God.
5. As regards construction, the classical use is with the genitive; in the NT we also find the prepositions *en*, *perí*, *epí*, and *katá* (for details see *TDNT*, II, 566).

B. The NT Concept of *exousía*.

The NT concept rests on three foundations. First, the power indicated is the power to decide. Second, this decision takes place in ordered relationships, all of which reflect God's lordship. Third, as a divinely given authority to act, *exousía* implies freedom for the community.

1. Primarily *exousía* denotes the absolute possibility of action that is proper to God alone as the source of all power and legality (cf. Lk. 12:5; Acts 1:7; Jude 25; Rom. 9:21).
2. God's *exousía* may be seen in the sphere of nature (Rev. 14:18). Natural forces derive their power from God (Rev. 6:8; 9:3, 10, 19; 16:9; 18:1).
3. God's will also encompasses Satan's sphere of dominion (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13). The final mystery of evil is not its power but the fact that this hostile power may still be encompassed by God's overruling (Lk. 4:6; Rev. 13:5, 7; Lk. 22:53).

4. In relation to Christ's person and work *exousía* denotes the divinely given right and power to act along with the related freedom (Mt. 28:18; Rev. 12:10). This is a cosmic power but with a special human reference (Jn. 17:2; Mt. 11:27; Jn. 1:12; 5:27: at the judgment). The historical Jesus claims *exousía* within the limits of his commission, e.g., to forgive sins (Mk. 2:10), to expel demons (Mk. 3:15), and to teach (Mt. 7:29; Mk. 11:28; Mt. 9:8; Lk. 4:36). This power is inseparable from the imminence of the kingdom; with the presence of him who exercises it, the kingdom itself draws near.

5. As regards the church, this derives its authority (or enablement) from Christ. Believers receive their right as such from him (Jn. 1:12; Rev. 22:14). The Lord gives the apostles their authority (2 Cor. 10:8); hence they must use it responsibly (cf. Mk. 13:34; 1 Cor. 9:4ff.). But *exousía* also means freedom for the community (1 Cor. 6:12; 8:9; 10:23). *exousía* was perhaps a slogan at Corinth, possibly on the basis of Paul's own teaching about freedom from the law (cf. Rom. 14:14). Some Christians found it hard to apply this in spheres where they might be implicated in paganism, whereas others were perhaps led into startling demonstrations of it (1 Cor. 5:1ff.[?]). Paul radically upholds *exousía*, but relates it to the two principles of what is fitting and what is edifying. *exousía*, then, is not intrinsic autonomy, as, e.g., in Epictetus, but freedom in God's kingdom by faith, so that regard must be had for the perils that lurk in freedom and for the needs of neighbors. In Christian Gnosticism we find hints of a development of freedom along the lines of the extremists at Corinth, while in apocryphal Acts *exousía* is not God's gift to be used in service but a magically wrested power deployed for one's own ends.

6. A special NT use, usually with *archai* etc., is for supernatural powers. We do not find this in Hellenism or Gnosticism, but cf. Asc. Is. 1:4; 2:2, etc. and Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, as well as Christian Gnostics and the apocryphal Acts. The concept developed on Jewish soil. *exousiai* are cosmic powers, distinct from *daímones* but not clearly different from *archai*. Paul combines the Jewish idea of the forces that rule nature with the Hellenistic notion of the nexus of destiny embracing the whole cosmos. There are thus various powers that govern human life and stand between God and us. They share the carnal nature of creation but also the fact that it is created in and for Christ (Col. 1:15-16). There is thus tension but no dualism, and the powers can never separate us from Christ.

7. The meaning of 1 Cor. 11:10 is much contested. In context the verse is part of the discussion of veiling (cf. the *plén* of v. 11). The verb *opheilei* implies obligation rather than compulsion and thus suggests a moral duty. It seems, then, that the veil is a sign of subordination and the angels are guardian angels or watchers over the natural order. *exousía* is thus used materially for the veil in a bold image suggesting male dominion. Alternatively it might be due to a confusion or intentional equation of the Aramaic stems for "to conceal" on the one hand and "to rule" on the other.

exousiázō. "To have and exercise *exousía* " as a. possibility, b. right, or c. power. In 1 Cor. 7:4 Paul is saying, not that each partner has a right to the body of the other, but that each forgoes power over his or her own body (c.). The exhortation, then, is to mutual service in marital questions too. Lk. 22:25 carries an allusion to Ecclesiastes (c.). In 1 Cor. 6:12 the point of the passive is that Paul will not let anything win power over him.

katexousiázō. This uncommon word occurs in the NT only in Mk. 10:42 and parallels in the sense of the exercise of political power but with an implication of compulsion or oppression. [W. FOERSTER, II, 560-75]i

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v. verse

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iKittel, Gerhard, and Friedrich, Gerhard, Editors, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1985.