

# BY WHAT AUTHORITY DOEST THOU THESE THINGS?

Matthew 21:23-27

This passage is another example of the Lord's having to deal with the opposition of the religious leaders of his day. As always, he put them to silence.

But this occasion furnishes a remarkable opportunity for us to study a lesson on the subject of authority in religion. Notice some things we learn about authority from this text.

## DISCUSSION

### I. THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS KNEW THE NECESSITY OF HAVING PROPER AUTHORITY IN RELIGION.

- A. That is why they asked this question--a perfectly legitimate question. (Their motives were not noble, but their question was legitimate.)
- B. They likely were familiar with Deuteronomy 4:2: *"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."*
- C. These chief priests and elders knew something the vast majority in the religious world today do not recognize: one must have authority for what he does in religion.

### II. JESUS KNEW THE NECESSITY OF HAVING PROPER AUTHORITY IN RELIGION.

- A. Otherwise he would have replied by saying, "What difference does it make?"
- B. If one does not have to have proper authority in religion, here is where Jesus would have said so.
- C. But notice what he said in John 6:38: *"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."*

### III. THE ONLY PROPER AUTHORITY IN RELIGION IS THAT WHICH IS FROM HEAVEN.

- A. Notice the question Jesus asked: *"The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?"*
  - 1. This is a question of authority.
  - 2. "Whence was it?" means where did the authority for it originate.
- B. That is what made this such a difficult question for these Jewish leaders to answer.
  - 1. If they say, "From heaven," they will be admitting they have not submitted to that which God authorized by direct command.
  - 2. If they say, "Of men," they will be accusing the people of doing that in religion for which there is no proper authority.

### IV. THAT WHICH HEAVEN ENJOINS IS MANDATORY.

- A. These Jewish leaders knew that. If they said the baptism of John was from heaven, they knew they had no right to reject it as they had.
- B. Compare to the attitude some today have toward the command to be baptized. Some say it is a command, but is not essential. These Jews knew better than that.
- C. It is a sin to loose what heaven has bound. Matthew 16:19 says, *"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

#### **V. THAT WHICH HEAVEN DOES NOT AUTHORIZE IS UNACCEPTABLE.**

- A. These Jewish leaders knew that also. They knew if they said the baptism of John was "of men" they would be accusing the people of doing that which was unacceptable.
- B. The incident of the worship of Cain and Abel taught them that. Hebrews 11:4 says, *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."*
- C. This truth is taught in a number of New Testament passages.
  - 1. Matthew 15:8-9: *"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."*
  - 2. John 4:24: *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*
  - 3. II John 9: *"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."*
- D. This is a truth the religious world in general has never learned, and many in the Lord's church have forgotten.

#### **VI. HOW DOES HEAVEN AUTHORIZE THINGS WE ARE TO DO IN RELIGION?**

- A. The Bible is God's way of communicating his will to us. It is his only way of communicating his will to us.
  - 1. II Tim. 3:16-17: *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."*
  - 2. II Pet. 1:3: *"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."*
  - 3. Psa. 119:105: *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."*

- 4.Psa. 119:130: *"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."*
  - 5.Psa. 19:7: *"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul . . . ."*
- B.The Bible teaches or authorizes in three ways.
- 1.Direct statement. It may be an imperative statement (command). Acts 2:38 contains an imperative statement. Mark 16:16 is a declarative statement, but carries the force of a command.
  - 2.Approved example. Acts 20:7 furnishes an example for eating the Lord's supper on the first day of every week.
  - 3.Implication (sometimes called "necessary inference"). Actually, the Bible implies a thing, and we infer or draw an inference from what the Bible implies.
    - a.One definition of *imply* is "to hint." This is not what we mean by the word. Necessary inference is drawn from an implication that demands that inference.
    - b.For example, the Bible plainly says that Abram went down into Egypt (Gen. 12:10). It never says in so many words that Lot went down into Egypt, but it teaches it just as surely as it teaches that Abram went down into Egypt. In Genesis 13:1 the Bible says that Lot came up out of Egypt. Since he was in Canaan with Abram before Abram went into Egypt (Gen. 12:5), and since he came up out of Egypt later, it follows that he went down into Egypt.
- C.The Bible teaches or authorizes both generically and specifically.
- 1.For example, Noah had specific authority for making the ark of gopher wood, whatever that was (Gen. 6:14).
  - 2.He had no specific authority for using a hammer, an ax, or any other tools. But he had generic authority for such.
  - 3.We have specific authority for singing. We have no specific authority for a song leader, a song book, or a pitch pipe, but we have generic authority for such. There is no authority at all, either generic or specific, for worshiping with a mechanical instrument.

## CONCLUSION

May God help us to respect the authority of his word.